

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Multi-academy trusts](#), HC 204

Wednesday 7 September 2016

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair); Lucy Allan; Michelle Donelan; Marion Fellows; Suella Fernandes; Lucy Frazer; Catherine McKinnell; Ian Mearns; Stephen Timms; William Wragg.

Questions 222-301

Witnesses

Dr Melanie Ehren, Reader in Educational Accountability and Improvement, UCL Institute of Education, **Professor Merryn Hutchings**, Emeritus Professor, Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University, **Natalie Perera**, Executive Director, and **Karen Wespieser**, Senior Research Manager, National Foundation for Educational Research.

Paul Barber, Director, Catholic Education Service, **Reverend Steve Chalke**, Founder, Oasis Community Learning, **Andrew Copson**, Chief Executive, British Humanist Association, **Reverend Nigel Genders**, Chief Education Officer, Church of England Education Office, and **David Wilson**, Director, Freedom and Autonomy for Schools, National Association.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Dr Melanie Ehren ([MAT0010](#))
- Professor Merryn Hutchings ([MAT0012](#))
- Natalie Perera ([MAT0039](#))
- National Foundation for Educational Research ([MAT0034](#))
- Catholic Education Service ([MAT0006](#))
- Oasis Community Learning ([MAT0035](#))
- British Humanist Association ([MAT0029](#))
- Church of England Education Office ([MAT0048](#))
- Freedom and Autonomy for Schools, National Association ([MAT0056](#))

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Melanie Ehren, Professor Merryn Hutchings, Natalie Perera and Karen Wespieser.

Q222 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to our session on multi-academy trusts. Our purpose today, certainly for this panel, is to look at the evidence, the research and the material around multi-academy trusts and test it to see if we can glean any further understandings from it. Thank you all for coming along today. We will be going on until about 10.30 am, I would say. We have five or six key questions that will, of course, produce some supplementary questions and opportunities to test further.

I am going to kick off. As we all know, the Government want to see more and more academies and schools go into MATs. Is the evidence on MATs' performance and impact strong enough to justify that ambition. Melanie?

Dr Ehren: Thank you. That is an interesting question. I would say no. We have seen a couple of research reports come out from other people on this panel that suggest that evidence on performance of multi-academy trusts is patchy at most.

Also, if I look at international evidence—and we have done a literature review on effectiveness of school governing bodies, for example—we know that what drives improvement of schools and student achievement is what happens in the classroom. It is the quality of teaching that matters most and not so much structural issues like governance or multi-academy trusts. So, I think my answer to that question would be no.

Q223 **Chair:** The contrary view would be that school leadership is the key to providing the kind of aspirations and performance in the classroom that you refer to. They would go on to say that through having autonomy and so forth within an academy, a multi-academy trust gives the sort of school improvement themes. That would be the counter, but what would you say to that argument?

Dr Ehren: Of course I agree with that. We see that leadership has an impact but it is an indirect impact. The impact goes through the quality of the teacher. If we talk about issues of leadership and governance, they need to support what is happening in the classroom and they need to ensure that the teacher can do a good job in the classroom. Any issue around leadership or governance has to be driven by supporting the teacher in the classroom in the end.

Q224 **Chair:** Does anybody else have any comments about that particular matter before I bring in Lucy?

Karen Wespieser: Yes. I would endorse and agree with what you said, but I think the plans to expand MATs is racing ahead of the evidence and as researchers we are trying to keep up. In most cases, in terms of the research evidence, the systems have not been in place long enough to



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say what works. We can look to other jurisdictions in other countries but at the end of the day they are different and their circumstances are different.

I would also endorse what you say about leadership, particularly about governance, which I think is a very important topic that you have heard about before. NFER did some research recently on executive head teachers and we found that within those the governance was often very unclear and that there was a lack of transparency. You really need that clarity in leadership to drive an effective MAT.

Q225 Chair: Are you saying that because of the MAT structure as a whole and the absence of, say, specialised school governors for each school or whatever, that is effectively taking away the governance structure to a detrimental effect?

Karen Wespieser: No, I wouldn't quite say that. I would just say that it is a muddle. That is not a technical term, but it is a bit of a muddle at the moment. I think when it works well it seems to be that there is a clarity in place. Whether that is having boards for each school or overarching boards, it does not really matter as long as there is a clarity and everyone within that structure and everyone who is part of it, the pupils and the parents, understand it. I think that is the most important thing.

Q226 Chair: You are less interested in the actual system as it looks as long as it is clear and transparent?

Karen Wespieser: I think that would be really important, yes.

Professor Hutchings: In terms of the speed of change in the system, in our research we only included academies that had been academies in a particular chain or MAT for at least three years so that we could see whether there was really an effect, but that meant we could include only quite a small number of academies and MATs compared with the number that have now sprung up. I think that is a real problem for research and for the going ahead.

The Government have been very selective in their use of the evidence that they are quoting to support what they are doing. They have said, for example, that academies across the country are transforming the opportunities of disadvantaged pupils. Our research would say that this is happening in a few MATs but not in all by any manner of means.

Q227 Chair: Natalie, do you have anything to say?

Natalie Perera: Just to go back to the initial question about whether the evidence is strong enough to support academies to expand, I think the first point to make is that what we see from the evidence of academy performance, be that individual types of academies or MATs, is that it is quite clear that they are not a silver bullet to raising standards. Another question that I am sure we will come on to is about whether they have



the capacity to expand, and that is an area too where the research bears out some limitations in that capacity.

- Q228 **Lucy Frazer:** Melanie, you said—and I think it is absolutely right—that the thing that changes a child’s education is the quality of the teaching in the classroom, but doesn’t the structure of a MAT allow you to enhance the teaching in the classroom by the sharing of resources from one school where you might have good teaching in maths or English to another that is not so good? Isn’t that the whole purpose of the MATs?

Dr Ehren: Yes, I agree that that is the whole purpose of the MAT and that can obviously benefit the quality of the teaching but only if that collaboration supports the exchange of good practice. My worry is that most of that collaboration is now mostly just copying and pasting practices from schools without strong evidence that that practice is going to work in another school.

Also, a lot of energy and time goes into preparing for the process of academisation. The process of converting takes up quite a lot of time and energy from schools to go through that process, time and energy that does not go into school improvement or thinking about how teaching can be improved.

Professor Hutchings: I don’t think you need a MAT to exchange information, resources and so on between schools. The London Challenge introduced a huge amount of collaboration between schools and schools working together without having to create MATs to do it. That can continue to take place whatever structure you have.

- Q229 **Ian Mearns:** Karen, you mentioned about international comparisons but your caveat on that was that circumstances are very different, and we know that they are. We know that a previous Secretary of State used to tour the world looking for good examples that we could follow in bits from time to time. Are there any particular good examples where this model works and are there any particular bad examples where this model does not particularly well?

Karen Wespieser: I thought you might ask something like that. There are not really a lot of other models. There is the obvious one, the charter schools in the States. I am by no means an expert on that but I did take a quick look at the evidence and it is not clear, I think would be a simple answer; more evidence is needed.

Stanford University did a study quite recently where they looked at charter schools run by management organisations—I think that is probably the closest we could get to a MAT—and they found no significant difference between reading and maths scores for the students in freestanding charters, the equivalent being freestanding academies, and those under management organisations. The US is similar but there is still no evidence.

- Q230 **Ian Mearns:** We looked at a couple of examples in the previous



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Parliament where in Massachusetts they had arbitrarily limited the number of charter schools within the state whereas Louisiana had gone for the whole state approach. It was quite clear that the standards in the two states were different but the circumstances were very different as well. Has any more evidence emerged about going for the whole state approach or the whole country approach?

Karen Wespieser: Not that I have seen. What I have seen is the huge variability both within and between states.

Natalie Perera: Melanie is more of an expert on international comparisons, but just on how the charter schools have operated in the States, one of the important and I think relevant limitations that was put on to charter schools is that they could not grow more than 5% each year, going back to that question of capacity and ability to grow.

Chair: We are going to talk about international comparisons later. What we are really talking about now is the evidence about MATs and that is what I hope Suella is going to ask about.

Q231 **Suella Fernandes:** Yes. On the evidence, how would you respond to the Department for Education statistics on secondary schools from 2013, for example, which showed that secondary sponsored academies were improving at a faster rate than other schools, even allowing for similar starting points, prior attainment and deprivation levels? I am talking about rate of improvement. Also, when it comes to primary schools, those that were sponsored academies were narrowing the gap on performance.

Professor Hutchings: From the evidence that we have looked at of the different MATs and their improvement rather than the individual academies, we found that the MATs that were performing well anyway improved faster than schools across the country that were not MATs. But the MATs that had underperformance were not improving as fast as similar schools and so MATs did not seem to be a solution for underperformance.

Q232 **Chair:** I have two more questions on this subject. One is: what further research do we need to conduct to discover exactly how effective MATs are?

Karen Wespieser: Lots, is the quick answer.

Chair: A bit more detail?

Karen Wespieser: Yes, I have a list. I think there is something that needs to be investigated about MATs and management. I spoke earlier about executive head teachers. The MATs are requiring a whole new leadership structure; how do MATs or the system support that in coming through? What to do when academies and MATs fail; what is the answer there? Rejected and excluded pupils seem to be higher in MATs than in maintained schools; why is that; what can be done about it; and what provisions are being put in place for those pupils?



There is the issue of the capacity of sponsors to take on new MATs. There is something interesting about the branding of MATs. Some of them are quite open and have a whole brand surrounding them; others don't. What impact does that have on the parents, the pupils, the teachers who might want to move to those schools, the schools that are looking for a sponsor? How are different subjects and departments arranged within MATs? We spoke a little bit earlier about the collaboration; what does that mean in the MAT setting? Does the geography, the clustering, help that or does it not make a lot of difference?

Then talking about the constitution of a MAT and just taking my researcher hat off for a moment and putting my governor hat on, I am a governor of a junior school and we are looking like we have to academise and form a MAT. We don't know whether we should form that MAT with other primary schools or with secondary schools. There is no evidence for these people to make those decisions.

Q233 Chair: That is a very interesting question—whether it is vertical or horizontal, basically. As far as I can see, there is no evidence to prove one way or the other and I would suggest that we do have some research on that particular matter. You could have a MAT with just primary schools, for example, and is that good for primary schools and what relationship does it then have with its secondary schools?

If you are talking about the vertical structure, how far would you go and how wide would you go? Would you be taking in sixth form colleges, for instance, and what impact would that have on the nature and characteristic of the MAT? I think that is an area where we need some research. Does anybody disagree with that or would they like to add some more?

Dr Ehren: I think that is a really important issue because that is going to be talking about what we call network level outcomes in the literature. It is outcomes that go beyond the individual school and to me the real benefit of multi-academy trusts comes in to improving and ensuring these kind of network level outcomes in ensuring a whole-through education for children, for example.

But in my view further research also needs to address the issue of small primary schools in remote areas. If we are going to move towards full academisation, what are the implications for small primary schools in remote areas that don't have that support structure, that don't have the opportunities to collaborate with other schools, conditions that have been in place for big secondary schools, for example?

Q234 Lucy Frazer: Is there a role for independent schools in the MAT scheme so that independent schools could support state schools?

Professor Hutchings: Some MATs have independent schools. They would say—certainly United Learning would say—that this is an effective strategy in that the independent school can learn from the academy and



vice versa, that it is not a one-way thing. I wouldn't know whether that is going to be more helpful than other interactions among schools.

- Q235 **William Wragg:** Melanie pre-empted the prefix I was going to ask for my series of questions on primary schools, that prefix being that only 13% of primary schools are part of MAT chains. A broad question to begin with is: can the MAT model work for primary schools? Melanie, if you want to start off.

Dr Ehren: I find that a very difficult question because the current MAT model is set, as I already mentioned, in a context of high support. We know that there is an issue around geographical location of collaboration and those are all very difficult issues for primaries in remote areas. If we think about collaboration and support of schools, perhaps we need to be looking at other structures than the MAT model.

- Q236 **William Wragg:** Do you have any evidence currently from those primary schools already in MATs?

Dr Ehren: I don't have that evidence. Perhaps other panel members have.

Professor Hutchings: We have not included primary schools in our research because there were not enough numbers to make it worthwhile. Again, this is an expansion that is taking place before the evidence becomes available. We are hoping to include them this year.

Natalie Perera: We have included primary in our league tables of MAT and local authority performance. Again, as with secondary, we see very little difference between the effectiveness of primary MATs and local authority primary schools. I agree entirely with Melanie about the problem with rural areas.

I think there are probably two things that might drive primaries to join MATs or start up MATs: a sense of moral purpose if they feel that there are schools near to them that they can help but also a sense of needing to make financial efficiencies. I think that might become more acute as we go further and further into the spending period where the real term professional school starts to really bite down. Then of course we don't know what will happen under a new national funding formula and what that might do to small schools.

- Q237 **William Wragg:** Would you say that a moral sense but more pressingly a financial sense are the two key incentives for strong primary schools joining or establishing a MAT themselves?

Natalie Perera: I am not convinced that they are incentives that the Department or the Government would want to rely on. You would not necessarily, in an ideal world, want a school to do something because they can't afford to do another option. If you look at a sense of moral purpose, I think you would probably struggle to find a sector that has a



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greater purpose than the education profession but I would not advise relying on that moral purpose as an incentive.

Q238 **William Wragg:** Does anybody have anything to add on that in particular?

Karen Wespieser: NFER has not looked at the multi-academy trust level of the data but we have looked at the academy level for primaries and we did not find any short-term benefits to school performance associated with academisation for primaries.

The other thing I would probably add is that this has been a time of multiple pressures, particularly for primary schools. Over the last year or so they have adopted new curriculums; they have been working without levels for the first time in 20 years; the teachers' pay and conditions and workload are all hitting quite hard and affecting things like teacher recruitment and retention. This is a really busy time in primary schools in particular and I have seen a warning in one Ofsted report that academisation can be quite a distraction from the business of teaching and learning.

Q239 **William Wragg:** That is an interesting point. If I were to close by playing the devil's advocate on this whole subject: you say there is a distraction because of all the things going on in primary schools, but perhaps also if I said that the LEA model and the system works, at least for primary schools, what would you say to that?

Natalie Perera: I think there is evidence that it does work in many local authorities. That is borne out by not only my organisation's research but by others too.

Karen Wespieser: They will reach a tipping point. I think the concerning issue for a lot of primaries is whether their local authority will have the resources left to support them as more of the other schools convert.

Natalie Perera: You mentioned that 13% of total primaries are in MATs, but just short of 80% of the primary academies are in MATs. That compares to about 50% of secondary academies that are in MATs. What we can see is that where a primary school is an academy it is far more likely to be in a MAT than a secondary, so they are making use of it.

Q240 **Stephen Timms:** Can I briefly return to the evidence on secondary academisation and put to you a couple of recent headlines from *Schools Week*? There was an editorial in *Schools Week* in July that summarised the research findings in this way, "Academy status works for the best and worst schools but that is about it". Do you think that is a fair summary of what we know so far?

Natalie Perera: I will respond to that first. I think that might be citing the research that we commissioned from the LSE. That found that when the LSE studied the impact of the pre-2010 sponsored academies under the Labour Government, they saw a much bigger impact on outcomes.



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That was equivalent to improvement of about one grade better in five GCSEs. When they looked at post-2010 converter academies, with the exception of the outstanding converted, they struggled to see any sort of sustained improvement compared to a control group but they did see an improvement for the academies that were already outstanding before they converted.

What you can deduce from that and what *Schools Week* has deduced from that is those early academies that were really the most challenging schools under the Labour Government have improved significantly. The ones post-2010 under the coalition Government that were outstanding have also improved, but only to about a third of the extent of the Labour academies. We can't really tell anything for everywhere else in between.

Professor Hutchings: I don't think the worst schools have necessarily improved through academisation. There is quite a number of examples of MATs with very low performing schools that continue to be low performing. We have done our research three years running and the same people are coming out at the bottom every time. I don't think there is any automatic rule that academisation will create improvement, even for the worst performing schools.

Q241 **Stephen Timms:** Can I come back to you, Natalie, because you are in *Schools Week* today and it says that you found there is a boost to key stage 4 performance on academisation but that tapers away to zero after three years. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Natalie Perera: We need to be really careful in how we interpret this, particularly in interpreting findings that have come out of the work that we have done with the LSE. We are comparing the post-2010 sponsored academies, so these are academies that were underperforming from 2010 and the Government intervened.

What we find when we look at this group of academies and we compare them to a control group who have then become academies later on down the line—that is the methodology the LSE uses—is in that year before the sponsored academies convert we see a spike or a peak in improvement that is equivalent to just over a GCSE grade and that is also relative to the control group. We don't know why that happens. We can make speculations and it is in the report in the *Schools Week* article about why that might be happening.

What is really difficult to then say is whether that improvement that we see again is sustained over a longer time period. The reason it is hard to tell is because our control group starts to behave differently. As they gear up to become academies they also start to experience that peak in improvement. That means that the findings that we have, where it looks like the sponsored academies are tapering back to zero, show that the sponsored academies and the control group are behaving more similarly to one another than we would expect. We need to do further work to untangle some of that.



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Q242 Stephen Timms: Can I come on then to health checks? The former Secretary of State told us in April that a multi-academy trust would not be allowed to expand if it does not have a strong record of school improvement. What specific criteria, in your view, should be used to determine whether a chain should be allowed to expand or not?

Karen Wespieser: I think it is correct that judgments should draw heavily on the regional schools commissioner's judgment, but beyond that there are a number of metrics that could be looked at as well; looking at key thresholds, whether they are floor standard or coasting. The number of academies that a chain already has is quite important, as well as where those academies are. Whether they are clustered together within a region or more spread out will influence how much support they can be given. The length of time that schools remain in those different categories, so you want to check not just a snapshot in time of how they are doing today but look at their improvement trajectory over time and whether they are skilled at guiding schools to become better.

Along similar lines is the nature of the school that they are taking on. It is not just about the academy chain and making sure that they are okay but it is looking at the schools that they might be taking on, whether they are of a similar type to the schools that are already part of the existing trust. If you have a trust of secondaries taking on a primary, will they know how to handle that? Finally, the other thing I would add is that if they are a new sponsor we perhaps need to think separately about what metrics they might require.

Dr Ehren: Can I add to that, looking at international research on what effective school collaboration looks like and what effective school governance looks like? There are two important issues to add to the metrics that Karen already talked about, which are: do schools have a shared vision on improvement; do they have a shared vision on what good teaching looks like?

I think that is an important metric also to consider when thinking about adding schools to an existing portfolio of schools in a multi-academy trust, but also the issue of network level outcomes. What is the purpose of the multi-academy trust? We talked about horizontal and vertical integration; what is that going to look like if a new school is going to be added to the portfolio? How are they going to add to those network level outcomes? Those are the two issues I would like to add to that.

Q243 Stephen Timms: Merryn, you have told us that some MATs are doing a very good job but quite a lot are not. Can you identify the characteristics of those that are doing a good job for this purpose?

Professor Hutchings: Can I say a bit about health checks first, because some things I wanted to say had not come up? Obviously we were very pleased to see Sir David Carter saying that the improvement for disadvantaged pupils would be part of his health check. Other things that occurred to me were that admissions or exclusions have been used to



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bring about improvement in results, which has certainly been the case in some academies.

I would look at the experience of staff within the academy chain, what the staff turnover is, what the career progression is, whether teachers are happy working in that chain, because you cannot expand if you are not popular with teachers, and what the experience of pupils is, and particularly pupils with special educational needs. Also whether the pressure to achieve exam results quickly, improvement in exam results quickly, is resulting in a narrowed curriculum, an increase in mental health problems and so on, which some research has shown.

Okay, so your next question was?

Q244 Stephen Timms: It is a linked question. You have told us that some MATs are doing a great job and others are not. Can you identify, can you make a MAT that says is this a good MAT that can be clustered to expand to take on another school?

Professor Hutchings: When we first started doing the Sutton Trust research, we tried to do a survey of MATs to find out what they thought they were doing, and we did not get answers from them. So we have looked mainly at the structural characteristics of MATs and we have said that the ones that are doing well have tended to have had slow expansion in a relatively limited geographical region. Those were the two main things that I think are now widely accepted.

However, we can find MATs that are not doing well, which meet those criteria, so obviously the structural characteristics are not sufficient and it must be more about the management and what goes on in the MAT. I know that Reform have a report coming out in the next two weeks, I am told. They have done a survey of 66 MATs, which hopefully might answer some of these questions, but I do not know what they asked them, so that should be useful. But I think we really need this research.

I was interested that Sir David Carter said, "We, the schools commissioners, know what makes a good MAT, we already know that". But he has not made it explicit to the wider world and I think everybody needs to know the answers to that question so that parents can look at a MAT and think, "Is this good enough?" so that other bits of the United Kingdom and internationally people can learn from what makes a good MAT. I don't think it is enough for the regional schools commissioners to say they understand the issues. It needs to be explicit.

Q245 Chair: Before I bring in Ian and Suella, what do you think a good MAT would look like, in a sentence or two?

Professor Hutchings: Their structures for bringing about school improvement, their understanding of school improvement, their ongoing support for schools is incredibly important. I visited one academy for some completely different research and I said, "What relationship do you have to the MAT you are in?" He said, "We never see or hear them. They



are far too busy in their office". That is not going to bring about school improvement in that school. So a real close involvement with the schools, knowing their schools and working with them according to their knowledge.

- Q246 **Suella Fernandes:** Two questions. Would you agree that greater autonomy to the frontline, to school leaders in how they teach in curriculum in what services they contract, in their terms of employment, the way they manage staff, run a school, in short, is an important factor that is linked to the success of a MAT or schools generally?

Natalie Perera: I think the first point to make—and Melanie might say more about this—is that even prior to the academies programme schools in the UK were among, if not in, the top three of the most autonomous of the developed countries. Even before the academies programme started, teachers and head teachers in England had far greater autonomy than many of their international peers.

The second point to make is that we do not know to a rigorous extent how schools and academies and MATs are using those autonomous powers or freedoms. Where they are using them, can we see that there has been an effect on performance or improvement or a narrowing of the gap?

- Q247 **Suella Fernandes:** Just on that point about teacher autonomy, I think definitely prior to the 2010 change of Government there was a very strong sense and evidence to back it up that teachers were encumbered by dictat from Whitehall, by targets, by constraints on national curriculum and teaching methods. I think that autonomy to teachers has been a critical issue that has been something that has changed.

Professor Hutchings: I don't think that our schools do have that much autonomy, in that they have to meet the targets for the expected levels for pupils. Primary schools, for example, have to get their children through the phonics test, which many schools believe is not contributing to them learning to them read well. They are still trying to meet targets and their curriculum is very much dictated by the form of the tests that the children are going to take.

Freedom of curriculum means freedom to teach to the test, which is not particularly useful, I think. I would rather see that they have to do some music, some art, than have the freedom to focus entirely on teaching to a test.

Dr Ehren: Can I add to that in saying that what we also see—this is anecdotal evidence from my own research projects—is that multi-academy trusts also restrict autonomy in the classroom? They have a very sometimes centralised approach to dictating teachers what to do in the classroom in terms of curriculum planning, lesson planning and types of assessment. We have been talking to teachers who tell us that their



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trust tells them to do testing every two or three weeks. That is not autonomy, to me.

Professor Hutchings: I agree with that. My evidence would show that too.

Q248 **Stephen Timms:** Are they worse than local educational authorities in that respect?

Dr Ehren: I have not made that comparison, so I could not say, but perhaps others can.

Q249 **Suella Fernandes:** My second question was that there is clear evidence that there are local authorities around the country where underperformance has been allowed to continue unchallenged without any intervention, without any remedy. Would you say that there is a connection between that stubborn underperformance and lack of autonomy or lack of school choice in those areas?

Dr Ehren: If we look at the international evidence, and there is an OECD report on this, that suggests that there are two issues that work, which is autonomy but also capacity. Those two things need to go together to drive improvement. Schools and teachers need to have autonomy to make decisions but they also need the capacity in terms of professional development to implement that autonomy.

Natalie Perera: I agree with that. It was a point that Lucy Heller raised at a recent academies conference we had, where it was about giving schools autonomy but they also need to have the capacity to innovate in order to use those autonomous powers in the best way possible. Where they do not have the capacity, which is what we might be seeing in some of the research where we found that certain types of academies have not shown any improvement, it may well be that they have not had the capacity to innovate.

Q250 **Chair:** Are we talking about spare capacity in that context?

Professor Hutchings: How would you define spare capacity?

Chair: Capacity that is not being used but is available to be used if schools are successful.

Natalie Perera: I am not sure that when a school becomes an academy it necessarily has more capacity. It has more freedom but it still has to deliver everything that the Government and potentially the MAT expects it to deliver. The question is how and to what extent should schools have more capacity in order to use their autonomous powers better.

Dr Ehren: It raises issues around retention and attracting new teachers into schools. I am not fully knowledgeable on the research in that area but I think we have seen reports that suggest that there are schools in particular areas who struggle with attracting new teachers in particular subjects. That would be an issue around capacity, obviously.



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Professor Hutchings: I think also, in answer to your original question, one of the things the London Challenge showed us what that having a body of people beyond the local authority, who could challenge the local authority as well as challenging individual schools, was hugely helpful in bring about improvement.

With MATs we now have RSCs, the national schools commissioner, which hopefully will bring about improvement, but at the moment we have MATs who, like the local authorities you referred to, have been languishing in low improvement for a number of years and have apparently not been challenged. So I do not think being a MAT means you automatically get the challenge, any more than being a local authority. I think you do need that extra layer to put the challenge in.

Q251 **Suella Fernandes:** As of June this year, 94 formal notices were issued by the regional schools commissioners for underperforming schools. That layer of accountability is absolutely critical to the success of independent schools.

Professor Hutchings: Yes, and we are waiting to see if it works, if those notices bring about improvement. We do not know yet and that is part of the research evidence we do not yet have.

Q252 **Ian Mearns:** I think what we are getting is a picture that some MATs are more prescriptive across a whole range of areas than others. One of the areas that I am a little concerned about is the methodology of school organisation. In other words, are there particular things that MATs are getting their schools to do that are bringing about improvements or otherwise, which are from a methodological approach?

For instance, there was a piece of research done, or a research paper published briefly and bravely earlier this year by Kingston and Oxford. They published a blueprint, a list of things that you should do if you want to improve your school. It included, for instance, if you are a secondary school, acquiring a local primary school and also weeding out poorer students. That was a very brave piece of work they published, but they did publish it. I am wondering is anything seen in terms of evidence about the approach of MATs to that sort of idea?

Natalie Perera: I am not aware of anything that rigorous to an academic quality data analysis of what the features are of an effective MAT and how that ought to be replicated in the system. I think the piece of work that you refer to is worrying as well as brave.

Dr Ehren: In my view that kind of perverse behaviour, if I may call it that, is particularly a result of accountability measures and how schools are held to account by Ofsted, by performance league tables and so on. The MAT perhaps reinforces that behaviour but it is not the MAT per se that would motivate that kind of behaviour, I believe.

Q253 **Ian Mearns:** To be fair to the people from Kingston and Oxford, this was something they pulled together from experience that they had had in



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terms of looking up what had been done in 160 academies. In other words, they published a blueprint from what they had found to work in 160 academies that they had looked at. That in itself is worrying, I would guess.

Dr Ehren: Absolutely.

Q254 **Chair:** On perverse outcomes and league tables, have any of you noticed any variance between MATs and other structures in terms of how those perverse outcomes are exhibited?

Professor Hutchings: The research that I did for the NUT about the outcomes of accountability and the impact on pupils showed that schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils, high proportions of pupils with special educational needs, schools in generally disadvantaged areas, experienced all the pressures of trying to meet—schools that had had historically low results as well were trying desperately to meet the accountability measures and therefore were putting a lot of pressure on pupils, which had negative outcomes. It didn't show that this was necessarily more so in academies, but it depended more on the level of performance. Sponsored academies that were underperforming were putting huge pressure on their pupils but other schools that were underperforming were putting the same pressures on.

Chair: Thank you. Stephen, have you finished your questioning on this area?

Stephen Timms: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. We are going to move on quickly to future expansion with Marion.

Q255 **Marion Fellows:** The Government has set high targets for the expansion of MATs over the next few years, 1,000 more by 2020. How realistic is this ambition, do you think?

Natalie Perera: I don't think we know. Until we have a better understanding of first what makes a good, effective, strong MAT and then secondly how you implement a health check or audit or whatever you want to call it to check whether particular MATs are meeting those criteria, are demonstrating those features of effectiveness and are therefore ready to expand, we cannot tell whether the figures that David Carter has published, indeed the figures that my own organisation has published, are realistic and robust. We simply do not know.

Marion Fellows: Would anyone else like to comment on that?

Professor Hutchings: Since we know that the best-performing MATs are the ones that have expanded slowly, suddenly forcing quicker expansions on them seems a bit of a problem. Our other concern is to do with new sponsors.

The record of the Government in accepting new sponsors and saying, "Yes, you can be a sponsor", has been that most have been accepted.



There does not seem to have been a very rigorous vetting process, and yet we need the new sponsors to hit the ground running. If we are only going to expand existing MATs slowly and really vet new sponsors, as we are told will happen, I think it is problematic to think that they can expand at the rate that they are hoping to.

Karen Wespieser: The point that was made earlier about making sure that everyone is coming along with this plan and everyone understands the plan, that it is transparent, is important. NFER did a survey of parents to find out what they know about academies, and they do not really seem to understand what an academy is and what differentiates it from a maintained school.

One of the other things we found, bringing it back to accountability for a moment, is that the parents do want the schools to be locally accountable. That is really important to them, but they do not understand at the moment where to go to if there is a problem in the system.

Dr Ehren: I would like to reiterate the point around primaries in remote areas as a specific problem when thinking about expansion of multi-academy trusts.

Q256 **Marion Fellows:** You foresaw my next question. I think I am getting a sense but I will ask the question anyway. Are the Department for Education and the EFA capable of managing this rapid expansion?

Professor Hutchings: At the moment with the number of RSC regions that we have, I would have thought probably not. It seems to me that there is a huge workload on each individual RSC when you look either at the number of schools in their region that are likely to become academies or the number they already have.

I would have thought you needed to vastly expand that infrastructure if it is going to work. Again, rapid expansion, they need to prove that they know what they are doing with what they have first, I would have thought, and develop the experience of how to vet a new sponsor, whether this new sponsor is then effective, and is their vetting right, before we keep expanding.

Natalie Perera: I was going to add to your point about problems that we see particularly in rural areas and parts of the north. If you look at the report that John Andrews published in my organisation, what you see is that there is hardly any—I think there are maybe one or two smaller northern local authorities—effective MAT coverage in primary in the north. There is more coverage at secondary, but again very little of that MAT coverage is performing at or above national levels. So we have a problem in the north in terms of getting high-quality MATs out there.

We also have another problem that Marion touched on, which is according to other estimates based on previous trends, we have on average about 15 new schools each month in the maintained sector that are judged by



Ofsted to be inadequate. That is 15 schools every month that will need to be re-brokered or that will need to be brokered into a sponsorship arrangement.

On top of that, you have around 123—the numbers might have shifted since March—inadequate academies and preschools, so again there is a re-brokering effort there for RSCs in finding MATs that have the capacity and the willingness to take on these schools.

Dr Ehren: Can I add two points to that? Talking about re-brokering and brokering of academies, that needs to be a very customised approach—we have seen that in the discussion this morning as well—taking into account issues around past performance, governance structures, types of existing collaboration, size, geographical location and so on. That is a huge effort to have that kind of customised approach.

There is also an issue around whether we want to put the funding and capacity that we have into an intermediate structure that manages that process. That is a really key issue to me. Do we want to put our funding into managing that process instead of feeding all that funding into the classroom?

Professor Hutchings: Can I just say something about re-brokering while we are on that topic? That is one of the things we really do not know how well it works yet. I know when Sir David Carter came to this Committee he talked at length about St Aldhelm's School and how the re-brokering had been an enormous success. If we look at the results they went up from, I think, 18% five A* to C to 31%, which is not yet exactly where you want them to be. It would take a few years down the line to see whether that re-brokering has really been a success.

We are worried that there is a possibility that some schools with particularly challenged intakes will get constantly re-brokered and not necessarily ever improve. We need to know what is happening to those before we adopt the wholesale system, I would have said.

Chair: Thank you. We are going to move on to the national comparisons with Suella.

Q257 **Suella Fernandes:** There is obviously a lot of international evidence pointing in both directions. To look at the positive evidence, there is the charter-school movement, and particular states like Minnesota, British Columbia, the Florida study, which have showed that autonomy, greater school choice in an area, has produced significant improvement, particularly among minority groups or in areas of deprivation, and led to over-subscribed successful schools.

That is supported to some extent by the PISA focus study and the McKinsey report that was relied upon by the DfE in its White Paper to support the idea that more autonomy, which is underlying the idea of MATs, is connected to school improvement. Surely that is a good basis of evidence to support the notion of MATs and the way they would work



here.

Dr Ehren: Can I come on to that question? I am always a bit cautious comparing different countries, because the culture and structure are so different. To just transport one reform into another country is difficult, at best. However, looking at the research around effective school governance and effective school boards, there are three issues that I would want to talk about. The first one is one that I already mentioned, which is that school boards and structures like these only have an indirect impact on student achievement through what happens in the classroom.

The second is that if we look at effective school boards and effective school governors, there are a couple of issues that we know do matter, in terms of having a shared vision, having a supportive climate in the school and supporting school improvement, having evaluation mechanisms in place to ensure that weaknesses are found and can be addressed, but also some level of organisational stability in schools. The issue around re-brokering is an important one there.

The third one is that effective school boards such as trusts adapt their governors and management to the portfolio of schools they have. If they have a portfolio of particularly failing schools, they would have a more managed, hands-on approach, whereas if they have a portfolio of very strong schools they would have a different approach, which is more about empowerment, about allowing for more bottom-up decision-making and so on. So it is not a one size fits all approach that we need to be looking at.

Q258 Suella Fernandes: Dr Ehren, in your evidence you warned of the risks associated with schools losing their autonomy and you cited the Netherlands as an example. How can England avoid the pitfalls that you say have happened in Holland?

Dr Ehren: Capacity is an important issue here, obviously. There needs to be sufficient capacity for schools to implement their autonomy, but there also needs to be an accountability structure and a support structure to improve that. In the Netherlands we have seen a system of school inspections and inspections of school boards also, looking at the performance of trust or school boards, having indicators and metrics in place that go beyond individual school performance.

So there would be metrics used to look at something like the performance of the multi-academy trust and network level outcomes, the quality assurance systems that they have put in place to support their schools in improvement, their financial management and so on, to have that kind of external scrutiny over what a multi-academy trust is doing, and adding to the school's performance.

Q259 Suella Fernandes: One last question on this issue. What is your view, as witnesses, on the effect of the dynamic of competition within a group of schools and giving parents more choice, and the effect of incentivising



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schools to perform by breaking up the provision and allowing more choice or a wider pool and more diversity in the provision of schools in an area? What view do you have on the effect that that can have on raising standards across the board?

Professor Hutchings: I think many parents don't realistically have a choice anyway. It is all very well to talk about choice, but in a rural area you have your local school and that is the one the transport goes to. We can get too hooked on choice being important. Then in urban areas the popular school is generally over-subscribed so quite a number of parents are not getting the choices they want. I am not sure that school choice is totally relevant. Sorry, that doesn't answer your question.

Q260 **Ian Mearns:** Hasn't the terminology really always been distorted, because in reality, you are right, parents do not have a choice? They have the right to express a preference but they do not have a choice.

Dr Ehren: Also competition particularly works well for well-educated parents, oftentimes picking the high-performing schools. We know from research also that competition leads to more segregation in the system, so there is an issue around that as well.

Q261 **Suella Fernandes:** But if you have an area where there are underperforming schools all run in the same way and with similar structures and there is no challenge, no different provider within that pool of schools, there is no incentive for those schools, from a leadership perspective, to improve, is there?

Karen Wespieser: Coming back to the research we have done with parents, parents do believe that they have a choice. They feel quite strongly that they do. But you are right, the choices they make are based on different decisions depending on their background and their income. That has an influence, but I am not sure the extent to which parents would recognise the choice that is being created by academies and MATs, whether they are looking at what the different ethos, provision and options provided by one MAT versus another are that exist. I don't know, that is an area for further research.

You also might start to get into a situation somewhere down the line where you being to have a monopoly situation where all the providers are the same, within perhaps even a larger geographical area, than you had with local authorities in the past. We just do not know at the moment.

Q262 **Chair:** We will leave it at that. Thank you very much indeed for your contributions and answers to our questions. It has been extremely helpful. We will now move on to panel number two. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Paul Barber, the Reverend Steve Chalke, Andrew Copson, the

Reverend Nigel Genders and David Wilson.

Q263 Chair: Good morning and welcome to our new panellists for this part of the inquiry into multi-academy trusts. What I want to stress before we start is that this is about MATs. It is not about religion, it is not about different religions, it is not about other religions that are not represented. It is about MATs.

You are here because you are part of well-known structures, well-known education providers, and it is that we are interested in. Our questions will be designed to emphasise that. What we are wanting to see here is what does a good MAT look like. We want to know, through your experiences as education providers, what exactly you think are the necessary characteristics of a MAT and perhaps the additional extras that separate one MAT from another. Thank you very much.

I am going to kick off with a question: what do the highest performing MATs do more successfully than the others? Paul, would you like to start off?

Paul Barber: The important characteristics of multi-academy trusts start with the important characteristics of any good school, which it starts with a well-articulated vision and ethos for the school, and that entails extremely good leadership. The areas where multi-academy trusts then start to become more complex and differ from individual schools—because they are a collection of more than one school—is that you need to have governance that is sufficient for the size of multi-academy trusts. That will vary depending on the size.

If you are talking about a multi-academy trust with two schools—of which there are very many statistics that are in the reports—then your governance is going to be very similar perhaps to a single school. On the other hand, if you are talking about very large multi-academy trusts where you have 30 or 40 schools then it is going to look very different.

It seems to me that the multi-academy trusts that are successful have a very robust governance system. They have an accountability framework that is in place. They have very clear delegation. People are clear about their roles and responsibilities both at the strategic board level and individual school level. That will differ in different types of multi-academy trusts, so you may have large multi-academy trusts with a heavily delegated system where a lot is decided at school level, or you may have one that are much more centrally focused. What is right is also part of the mixture. Those structures have to be appropriate for the type of multi-academy trust for the local circumstances. The other thing is there is no one size fits all.

Q264 Chair: Would anybody like to add to that?



Reverend Genders: Yes, I would like to add that. I absolutely agree with what Paul is saying. The interesting thing is that as these structures have been evolving and developing over time you see multi-academy trusts change from one of the ends of the spectrum that Paul was describing to moving along the spectrum. So you may start off with two or three schools in your trust but if you end up with 20, 30 or 40 then you will have to change your structure as you go along.

What we have done is create a self-assessment tool for multi-academy trusts to use to help them to understand how that development process is happening and to examine all those things that Paul mentioned. But also to think about—just in addition to those things—the kind of school-to-school improvement that goes on within the multi-academy trusts and how robust that is, and how robust the back office function that has been built around it is in supporting all of the schools within the trust. That is all part of the ongoing development.

We now have 800-something Church of England academies over the country, the early ones started with that kind of one or two schools system and we have some now that have many more in than that. You are seeing that kind of development and transition that requires the development of school improvement resources, of the back office function, but also importantly—just to add to Paul's list—is the ability for the MAT to contribute beyond itself as well. So if it just becomes a very inward focusing, "We are interested just in our MAT" then we would see that as a bad thing. It is about how they use the strength of their MAT to then contribute to the sector beyond, and to the community beyond.

Q265 **Chair:** What mechanisms do you have to ensure effective and continuous parental engagement?

Reverend Genders: Do you want me to carry on? At the heart of our schools is always that issue of parental engagement. Schools are there for the community and for the parents. They are there as partners with parents in catering for their children. That engagement can happen in all sorts of ways, so some will, with their local governing body, make sure that there are parents involved in that local governing body. Some will take a non-governance approach to that continual involvement of the community and parents. There is room for both those models.

But what is vital, and any good school will be doing this, is ensuring that they understand the parent community and understand the parents' views and that parents are able to contribute to the thinking of the school and, as Paul rightly says, the vision and the ethos of the school.

Q266 **Chair:** You have emphasised the school and not the MAT in that answer. Is that because you simply think that the school is the instrument to collectively carry that out?

Reverend Genders: So the MAT will make sure that if it is running good schools within its MAT then that is an inevitable part of that process.



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Just if I might add, I am not sure that the parents are terribly interested in the back office function or the under the bonnet stuff that is going on in the MAT. They need to know that the school can rely on those things but parents are more concerned with the type of education that their children are experiencing.

Reverend Chalke: If I can go back to the first question to begin with and then talk about families. I agree with everything that has been said about clear and effective accountability. One of the problems in the sponsored schools that Oasis has become responsible for—77% of our schools have been in the poorest areas and they have been sponsored schools because they are struggling or failing—is that in the local authority system there is an ambiguity.

The ambiguity is about who is responsible for the school. Is it the local authority or is it the governing body? The gap between the two means that often a lot of stuff just falls down the middle. So if a school is doing well and the head leaves and new head is appointed does that governing body have the professional skills to appoint someone? Who is looking at long-term succession, all of those things?

In our governance model we have a hybrid system, so there is clear central professional accountability national and regionally. We have one board—like all academy sponsors—and that board is responsible. If one of our schools fails it will be to Oasis Community Learning that Ofsted and the Department come. They will not go to the local governing group. They would never do that, of course.

You have to have clear central accountability systems, common language, all of the things that have been talked about, but then you have to ask the question: in this new world—if it is a new world—what does a local governing body do? That has probably never been clearly nailed in our educational system. At least not in my lifetime. I am no educational historian.

We have redefined our governing bodies. We call them “local academy councils” and we set them a role, which is clearly described, which is very different from that of the professional management of the structures. What they are responsible for is: does the ethos of Oasis, our value as an ethos, include community engagement? So our values and ethos are not just about narrowly defined education but they are about engagement of the whole community. The academy council’s job in our hybrid system is to hold the professionals within Oasis and the Oasis central board accountable for, “Is what you say happening here?”

We invest heavily in community facilities. Just across the river here we run a primary school and secondary school but outside of that we have sent up a children’s centre, a food bank, a debt advice centre, we run the local library, and so on. We work in the hospital, we developed a farm and we believe all those things make for parental engagement.



Q267 **Chair:** Andrew and David, do you have anything you would like to add before I go on to the next theme?

David Wilson: I agree entirely with the need to define what the various levels of the MAT structure should be doing. The answers to the question so far—all of which I agree with—just indicates that there are different types of MATs. When we talk about a MAT we are talking about a whole variety of different structures and approaches. The important thing in that is what works in that area, what works for that community?

Q268 **Chair:** David summed up the theme there quite well. I was going to ask: do you think the Department should be looking at a set of criteria for what a good MAT looks like so everybody can understand what a good MAT looks like? Without wishing to pre-empt your answers, obviously that would be a very qualified answer at best, wouldn't it?

Reverend Genders: From our perspective, I mentioned the fact that we have already developed our own self-assessment tool for that because we think the MAT needs to be able to sit back and have an assessment of how it is doing. It would be helpful if there were some broad guidelines, so all the things that Paul mentioned and I added to and other people have given evidence about are fairly obvious areas that you might want to check the MAT is doing okay on.

So if they were a regime that set those out in the breadth that still enabled the individual variety of different MATs to function in very different ways, depending on where they are on that spectrum, that would be fine. We are in that process anyway because it is good self-governance to make sure that you are checking how well you are doing and what your method of success is.

Q269 **Chair:** Would you say that there ought to be a checklist of characteristics? You can vary those characteristics but at least you should have some knowledge of them?

Paul Barber: We also have a national working group. We have been working on self-assessment and also trying to look at what a good multi-academy trust looks like within our experience of over 450 academies, most of which are multi-academy trusts—and we have very different ones: large ones, small ones and differently organised.

It seems to us—the picture is coming out—that there are a set of criteria that describes good multi-academy trusts but in a way that is about the principles rather than—and many of the things have been mentioned already—a prescriptive list that says what it has to look like in terms of the organisation. The list that ASCL came up with is a very good one as a starting point for looking at those principles that should apply in every multi-academy trust, which do not prescribe what size shape and level of delegation there is within the different types of multi-academy trusts.

David Wilson: If you look at a school, those characteristics, that framework, already exists. It is within the Ofsted guidance and schools



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may not agree with it but they know what they are going to get. What is missing in all that is an approach from Ofsted itself that says, “We have MATs, we should be looking at the MATs because they are supposed to be making a difference and contributing to achievement across the piece” but they are not.

They are fairly comfortable inspecting a school. When it comes to that wider body they find two difficulties: first, in bringing it all together to look at all of those schools within it or a selection of those schools within it, and secondly, they do not understand governance. There is nothing within the framework that says, “This is what good governance and leadership across a MAT—not within a school, but across a MAT—should look like”. If that was in place we would have a piece inserted into the jigsaw that you could say, “We are getting somewhere close to it”.

Q270 Chair: That answers two questions, doesn’t it? First, is that it suggests the Department should have a framework for governance, or whatever, for a MAT. Secondly, if Ofsted is wanting to start inspecting MATs it would want to have some sort of framework that was familiar to it so it could compare and contrast. Do you agree?

David Wilson: But its framework is about outputs, it is about outcomes. I agree with the point being made it should not be about inputs because a MAT of small primary schools in Norfolk will look much different from a MAT of secondary and primary within a conurbation. So it needs that flexibility to say whatever it is they are doing this is what it should look like when it is finished.

Reverend Chalke: I simply agree with that point. We are a MAT that has been inspected. We fared averagely well in that, and so on, but our comment would be, from our board, that Ofsted do not have the skills to inspect a complex charitable organisation. They just didn’t understand our governance model at all, nor did they understand the charitable status that is given to us by the DfE, so they were utterly incompetent in their ability to inspect the MAT.

Q271 Chair: The one problem about that is if Ofsted cannot understand it, can your parents, can your stakeholders?

Reverend Chalke: Our parents are not inspecting the MAT. All that is needed—

Chair: That is not what I asked.

Reverend Chalke: —is a body that understands governance to work with the organisation it is inspecting. I agree with David’s point; the governance model for a MAT with two, three or four schools will be different to one with 30 or 40 schools and if the big MAT has 30 or 40 schools in one region of the country, its model will be different to one that is regionalised. The other problem that we encounter is that the regional schools commissioners don’t have, at the moment, one standard accountability framework, and that varies.



Q272 Ian Mearns: Do you understand your governance model for your complex charitable organisation and if you can understand it yourself, would you mind putting it on two sides of A4 and sending it to us here?

Reverend Chalke: We have already done so. We have sent you this. We sent it in a month, two months ago. So you should have that. We set out eight or nine bullet points that we think would make for a more effective operation between the DfE and MAT.

Q273 Ian Mearns: That describes how your organisation works?

Reverend Chalke: Yes. We also have this booklet we sent into you; it is our "Scheme of Delegation". It describes in detail our strata—

Chair: We will read that later, Steve.

Reverend Chalke: You have had it for a couple of months.

Chair: We will read that later. What we are going to have is a question from Suella.

Q274 Suella Fernandes: There has been a question raised about the capacity for MATs to go through the process of expansion in setting up and recruiting new staff. I would say that good teachers are what are critical to the success of the school and the impact of a bad teacher can be disastrous. What has been your experience in the establishment of your MATs and increasing standards in finding that capacity and getting the best out of teachers? What is in it for teachers?

Reverend Genders: There are probably two or three questions there.

Suella Fernandes: There are, sorry. I bombarded you.

Reverend Genders: If I go with the first one and that question of developing capacity. It is an important question because there is a chicken and egg scenario in all of this that how can you demonstrate capacity to run a number of schools until you can run a number of schools? Improving the capacity is quite a challenge. But also having the capacity is quite a challenge. Go back to the different scenarios that have already been described. If you are a large secondary school and you wanted to increase your MAT to take on a couple of primary schools or maybe another secondary school, you are starting from the position of quite substantial capacity in terms of what you already have.

If you are trying to create a MAT of several small primary schools then you are not starting from the same base. The model of incremental growth does not quite work in the primary sector, which is why—from our experience with so many primary schools and rural primary schools—they have been slower to take on board the kind of multi-academy trust structure. That is because if you just say, "Let's start with two or three primary schools" you will never have the capacity to do the quality of back office function or the school-to-school support or the things that you want to do. You need 20 primary schools of 100 pupils to get together,



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not three or four. Doing it piecemeal is a disadvantage in terms of that building capacity.

Chair: We are going to move on to Catherine. She is going to be talking more specifically about faith-based MATs.

Q275 **Catherine McKinnell:** There have been some concerns expressed about the growth of faith-based MATs. Andrew and David, you are both here representing organisations that have given written evidence setting out some of those concerns. Could you just briefly explain what your main concerns are?

Andrew Copson: Our principal concern is that the rise of mixed MATs in particular is giving religious organisations undue influence over schools that were previously community schools, non-religious schools. That problem has a number of causes, mostly to do with the governance arrangements of MATs, which favour religious organisations very strongly. If, for example, one school in a MAT was previously a voluntary-aided religious school the religious body has at least a majority of MAT board members as a right. Even if the other six or seven schools in that MAT are community schools just by one voluntary-aided religious school in the MAT the religious body has a majority of MAT board seats.

One voluntary-controlled religious school in a MAT, the religious body gets at least 25% of seats. So it is still a very considerable number. Each religious school that comes into a MAT can also appoint very often a board member to that MAT.

That is obviously a very big problem because there are now 350 former community schools in mixed MATs with religious schools. Their governing bodies—from the point they join the MAT onwards if they retain governing bodies—will be appointed in the future by that religiously dominated MAT board. Once those governance arrangements begin to trickle down then you see previously inclusive community schools designated often as having a faith ethos.

By the point in 2022 where all state schools are academies, we would expect to see an extension of what is already happening, which is that schools that were previously completely open and had inclusive admissions policies, are operating religiously restrictive admissions policies. Schools that had open, quite objective, religious education syllabuses are adopting syllabuses that are far less objective and more skewed towards the religion that controls the MAT.

Posts that were once open in school leadership positions to qualified people, whatever their religion or belief, are now designated as being for people of particular religions. All of that has happened in academies that have converted, that were previously community schools and are now religious schools. It is set to the inbuilt structural advantages that are in both the regulations, and in government policy, and the memorandums of understanding that the DfE has agreed with religious providers, set for



considerable expansion. That threatens of course parental choice, the objective education of children and an inclusive education system for the future.

Q276 Catherine McKinnell: David, do you have anything to add?

David Wilson: I do not have anything to add to that. Parental choice is important in all this and whether that is to send your child to a faith school or to a non-faith school I do think that should be respected. I do take the point about there should be a control that says the ethos of the school when it joined the MAT perhaps should be preserved within the MAT rather than allowed to be changed to something the parents may not have agreed to at the outset.

But my organisation's main view on this is: does it benefit the school in terms of improvement for the child and achievement rather than the ethos that surrounds it?

Q277 Catherine McKinnell: That is helpful. That leads us in—

Reverend Genders: We certainly want to say something about that.

Catherine McKinnell: —to make a response. So how would you respond to some of what was said?

Reverend Genders: Absolutely, and there are a lot of ifs and maybes and presumptions in what Andrew is saying but very little reality. If you look at the actual reality about the agreements that have been clearly made between the Church of England and the Department for Education, it is that where community schools come into MATs that are either controlled in a majority or a minority way by church appointees then we are absolutely clear about the ongoing continuity of that community school being safeguarded. The community school, for as long as it wants to, to be able to continue to function as that kind of community school within the MAT.

There are lots of potential scare stories but the reality about what is happening on the ground is that we are making sure that that happens from our perspective, just as where Church of England schools are going into academy trusts where they are in the minority we would expect those same protections to be there for the Church of England school as well. It works both ways and the memorandum of understanding, the funding agreements—all the documentation that is in place with the Department for Education—is absolutely clear about that.

Catherine McKinnell: Sorry, I will just take Paul first and then I will come back to you.

Paul Barber: We have no mixed multi-academy trusts at the moment. All our academies are converters. There are two things that were asked: one was about expansion and also about mixed academy trusts. In terms of expansion, we are not looking to expand except where there is



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additional parental demand for more Catholic education, which is the case in some parts of the country.

In terms of the mixed multi-academy trusts, our schools quite often assist schools—Catholic schools and other schools—as partners within the system, and that is our contribution to the common good. What happened was that there were calls from various local areas for there to be a possibility for a Catholic multi-academy trust to take on a school that was not Catholic in certain circumstances where that was right in the local area.

We did quite a bit of work with the Department for Education to get rid of any legal barriers that would stop that happening. Last year we agreed new articles of association that would allow that to happen where the local community—the local area—are saying to us, “Can you take this on? Is this a way you can support a school?” But all of those documents, as Nigel said, are very clear that that would not be a school becoming a Catholic school by joining a Catholic MAT, it would be a school where all the legal documents are absolutely clear that that school’s existing character would be preserved within that situation.

Reverend Genders: Just to add as well to the point, it is easy to paint a scenario where there is this predatory church trying to take on all of these schools, which is not the case at all. What is happening is that community schools are coming to diocesan or church-led multi-academy trusts and saying, “What you are offering, the values of education that you are describing and articulating, the kind of way of working is something we want to be part of, so please can we be part of that?” It is a very different scenario to a church in takeover bid.

Andrew Copson: Just very briefly to respond to four of the points that Nigel made. He says the MATs would respect community schools coming into a MAT that are in a minority in that MAT, just as he would want church schools to be respected if they were in a minority. But, as I pointed out, church schools from the moment they enter a MAT are thenceforth no longer ever in the minority at the board MAT level because of the—

Reverend Genders: They are.

Andrew Copson: That is not the case.

Q278 **Chair:** How does that work because—

Reverend Genders: For a voluntary-controlled school MAT where we would only have 25% of the board.

Andrew Copson: Like I say, voluntary-controlled schools are 25% but religious—

Q279 **Catherine McKinnell:** There are circumstances where there may be in a minority?



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Andrew Copson: There may be but so far that has never happened for very long because then the individual religious schools also appoint trustees and there is a general effect, and voluntary-aided schools are a majority.

The second thing that I wanted to pick up on was this idea that a MAT would respect the ethos of a community school for as long as it wanted to maintain its community ethos rather than its religious ethos. I tried to explain again how that was likely to be time limited in any case, once the trickle down powers of appointment had occurred from a religiously dominated MAT.

On the accusation, I suppose, that some of the things that I have said were speculative or provisional, I should say that every single scenario that I sketched out has occurred in real life as a result of a MAT and is scheduled to increase in frequency.

In terms of the Church of England being supplanted by community schools to take them on rather than being predatory, there are situations where both of those things have been the case. But we have certainly worked not only with community schools that are trying to fend off a local Church of England takeover, but also with Church of England schools who fear that joining a MAT will decrease their community ethos and religionise what they are trying to provide to the whole community at the moment.

"Predatory" is a sort of straw man, but I think there is an acquisitive side to the Church of England's policy, and you can see that in its official documents outside of this context when it refers to, for example, its ambitions to increase its number of schools, and the fact that there are more children in its schools in the state sector now than there are people in its churches on a Sunday morning. That does stack up to a deliberate acquisitive strategy of schools.

Chair: I think we are heading into the wrong kind of territory here.

Q280 **Catherine McKinnell:** I just have one more question. There is often talk about Church of England, Catholic, and including them together in a multi-academy trust. Are there any examples—or do you see it occurring—of multi-faith, multi-academy trusts?

Reverend Chalke: Could I chip in there? As I have "Reverend" on the front of my name, perhaps I should say something about this. I set up the Oasis Trust—so it is born out of who I am—in my early 20s, 31 years ago. I wanted to create, among other things—Oasis runs housing, all sorts of things—great schools in poor communities where opportunity was denied to young people.

The Sutton Trust just recently reports that schools serving the poorest children in the poorest communities are four times more likely to be failing than schools in the wealthy areas of our country, and that is the



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truth. My faith has been an input. Oasis has grown up and it is called a Christian foundation.

However, there is a whole load of misinformation out there, at least from our point of view. We run 47 academies. We do not run faith schools. We would like to call our academies community schools. All of our schools are fully inclusive. They work with the local authorities' admissions criteria. They never seek to break them. They accept that catchment area. We pay on the spine for teachers and so on.

We employ probably more committed Muslims than we do committed Christians because we work in the poorest areas in the country. Our ethos does not insist on imposing the belief and the history of the movement on people, but at the same time our inclusion of all comes from the faith that created the charity in the first place. Does that make sense?

Catherine McKinnell: Yes.

Q281 **Michelle Donelan:** How successful is the school-to-school support within the MATs at raising the results of underperforming schools, and do you think this is the best model to achieve this, especially in primary schools?

Reverend Genders: The model of school-to-school support is one that is so important to the development of teaching and learning within each school. How successful? Whether it is done through determined school-to-school supports outside of the multi-academy trust structure or within the multi-academy trust structure is less the issue. The fact that it needs to happen is really important.

I can take you to examples of schools across the country where the fact that they have been able to pair up or join with a group of five or six other schools where they can share the expertise of a maths teacher or a French specialist or a music specialist makes a huge difference. I was in a school just at the beginning of this term where they have opened a new secondary school, and the fact that they can plan together and train together and do CPD together and they can move teachers from one school to the other where there is a particular need is vital to the improvement within the school. It has a huge effect.

That could happen outside of a multi-academy trust structure or within it. I think the fact that it happens is the really important thing.

Q282 **Chair:** You mentioned subjects there. Is that the structure you tend to use for that school-to-school support, through the structure of head of department and moving teachers around within a subject, or is that just part of the story?

Reverend Genders: It is just part of it. It is an obvious part, which is an easy example to latch on to, but it happens also at the data analysis side within a school. You do not need five experts in data analysis in each of these schools. Let's have one expert in data analysis who can work



across the group of schools and say, "Actually, this data is showing us that we need to improve in these areas". You can do it at that level as well as the subject specialism. In primary schools particularly, it can be hard to find people who can cover all of the expertise that you need in one school.

Q283 Chair: That was going to be my point, that you have a small primary school and two or three teachers, then your model of moving teachers around to fill the appropriate subjects or at least support those subjects is effective, isn't it?

Reverend Genders: Yes, absolutely.

Paul Barber: I entirely agree. School-to-school support is one of the most important and effective ways of school improvement. As Nigel said, it has been around for a long time, and I think that we have had an advantage in our experience with our diocesan partnerships that we have perhaps been able to harness that school-to-school support in pre-academy in all sorts of different ways. That could be at subject level, it could be at leadership level, it could be at governance level, and we have plenty of experiences of all of those.

Also, the other point that Nigel made about, in a sense, economies of scale, where you do not need one person doing a particular job in every single school but you can pool resources and co-ordinate those, and we have examples of those, pre-academy, in our system. Probably the most well-known is the Birmingham Schools Partnership, which was quite formalised in terms of pooling resources and having people employed at the centre to share those resources around.

In one sense, the structural side is not irrelevant but it is perhaps less important. However, multi-academy trusts do open some doors and clear away some barriers to that school-to-school support that do exist if all the schools are individually run and governed.

Q284 Michelle Donelan: I think the message that I am hearing is that it is not definitely the best way to achieve school-to-school support, but it is a way. The important thing is that we are getting the school-to-school support so it is good in that sense.

Reverend Genders: I want to go slightly further than that and say yes, that is absolutely true, and I agree with myself. I would like to go slightly further and say that where a multi-academy trust is employing all of these people, then the ability to be able to move people into the right spaces at the right time is slicker, so there are advantages in that.

Again, another school I have been in this term has taken School Direct students across the academy. Rather than being focused in one school, they have said, "We will take them on as an academy, which means that we can place them in the different schools and they can get a better experience from working in those different schools". They are academy



employees and they are able to move them around in that way, which you could not do just by a collaborative arrangement or federation.

David Wilson: It is a well-trodden path, school-to-school support, both within MATs and outside of MATs, and at its best it is very good, but it tends to be traditional. It tends to be about shared CPD. It tends to be individual support, things that have been going on for years. I think multi-academy trusts—particularly where you have mixed secondary/primary multi-academy trusts—open the door to lots of different things that we now could do.

For example, we could have better modern foreign languages teaching down at the early primary phase using specialist teachers to help train the teachers or work with the pupils. We could do something about poor transition from primary to secondary, where pupils are not necessarily ready for that, and can use some of the better practice in primary, which is extremely good, within the secondary sphere to continue to teach them without necessarily that immediate dip into, “Here is a range of subjects you need to learn”. I think it opens up a whole vista for us of things we could do, which we are probably not yet doing.

Reverend Chalke: Could I simply add that I agree with all of that, so I will not repeat any of it? An additional thing it does is if you have a group of academies and everybody is employed by that academy trust in a community—some communities will have seven or eight schools in a geographical area—it removes competition. In the sponsored schools that have come into us, the vast majority of our schools are sponsored schools, teachers constantly talked about local networks of schools that were very highly competitive and they did not feel supported within, whereas—perhaps this is an accident, but I think it is probably true—each one of our schools is called “Oasis Academy” somewhere, Oasis. In actual fact, because they all have that label Oasis, the success of one is the success of all, and the failure of one is the failure of all. Perhaps that helps create the bonding and it takes away the competitiveness.

One final aspect about school-to-school support. Going back to where we started or where we were previously on the complex needs of managing a large MAT and the skills needed, the point is that even the most proficient head teachers in the country do not necessarily have those skills, but if you are going to create succession in a MAT, you need to train people to do those jobs. By grouping together, you can create those career paths that will end at a wider level.

Q285 **Suella Fernandes:** That has answered the question I was going to ask, which is: going back to teachers at both points of their careers, would you say that there are more opportunities for career progression and increasing responsibilities and going up the career within a MAT, and that can happen more smoothly, while retaining a teacher continuity for schools or pupils? Equally—second question—at the other end, would you say there is more opportunity to grow your own and train teachers who



are then there for a longer period?

Reverend Chalke: If I could say something very briefly and then hand over to other people, I think all of those things are true. I also think that within a MAT, a family of academies where you are known, your strengths and your skills are known.

A head teacher will leave, and that head teacher was great in the playground and great with the parents but lousy at data and that was a real weakness, and Ofsted pointed it out, so that school will now go and appoint something who is fantastic at data and loves sitting in front of a screen, but the parents lose trust and so on. Within a MAT, not only is there an opportunity for career progression but you are really known, and no one person has it all, so we build a team and support each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Reverend Genders: Yes, I agree with both sides of what you have said. Particularly if you look at smaller schools, the opportunities for career progression if you are a young teacher who wants to grow and you go on in your career in terms of taking on a leadership role, then there can be very limited opportunities for that within a very small school.

As soon as you are grouped with other schools, you can begin to see that work over a range. Again, the academy trust leaders that I talk to say that they are much more able to develop staff effectively for the good of the whole system within that kind of a context, and that is a really positive thing.

David Wilson: I think it is true. Growing your own and career progression within a MAT is a good thing. However, I do think it can go too far if you are not careful, and you still need to test what you are taking on against the big wide world out there, otherwise it becomes a bit too incestuous.

Q286 **Stephen Timms:** I would love to explore whether the Church of England is predatory, but I will not. I will come on to the question. Some parents have told us that the multi-academy trust managing their local school, if it is headquartered miles away, can be quite difficult to deal with and seem very remote. Is there an opportunity for faith-based multi-academy trusts to foster stronger, better links than others with their local community?

Reverend Chalke: If I begin simply because I spoke briefly about this to begin with—

Chair: "Brief" is the operative word.

Reverend Chalke: We are regionally organised and we are locally organised. I am sure Andrew's figures about how many percentage of people that you can have in a local government body are from some document or the other, but our local academies are all local people. It is



driven out of the locality, so the connection with the local community I think is absolute.

Q287 **Stephen Timms:** Is there something in a faith-based approach that makes it easier, more likely to engage with a local community than others, or not?

Reverend Chalke: I think that a tenet of my faith in Christ is incarnation. I believe in local delivery. I believe that you do best if you live there, if you know the people, and what I—

Q288 **Chair:** Interestingly put there, Steve. Nigel.

Reverend Genders: Yes. Certainly, from our perspective, that has always been the way the Church of England has operated. We are embedded in the community, and the link between the school and the church and the community is one of those vital aspects of that. As I said in my first answer, seeing ourselves as partners with the community and partners with parents is essential to that kind of education we are providing.

I absolutely think that the way we have structured academy trusts within the Church of England is very local. The biggest we get is a diocese, which is still pretty small compared to a local authority, and what we tend to have is local church school-led multi-academy trusts within a diocese, or a diocese with hubs working within it. It is kept at a very local level because that engagement with the local community is so vital to the whole education of the child. It is not just about what they do in school.

Paul Barber: There are two fundamentals for us. One is that all of our schools were created out of local communities and are connected to those local communities and stay rooted in them. Secondly, our philosophy is that the parent is the primary educator of their child and that our schools exist to assist parents. The connection with parents and the local community is absolutely fundamental to what our schools are, and our experience, like Nigel's, is that our schools stay rooted in those local communities even when they are as large as a diocese but not larger.

Q289 **Stephen Timms:** Drawing on your experience, what are the lessons for other multi-academy trusts about how they remain connected with their local communities?

Reverend Chalke: The connection with parents that has just been referred to is huge. For instance, locally here we took on the local library when Lambeth Council could not run it. Why did we take on the local library? Because it was going to shut, and we believe the literacy of the parents is really important, and that created another meeting place for us. It is not irrelevant to our schools. It is at the centre of what we do. We only knew about the closure of the library in the first place because we are local people.



Andrew Copson: Just in response to this question so that there is some level in it, I cannot see that there is any reason to believe, nor is there any evidence to suggest, that faith-based academies or even schools are more in touch with their local communities or more able to galvanise their communities or more able to reach out into their communities than plenty of other schools. Other non-religious community schools of course provide excellent case studies of community engagement themselves, sometimes assisted by the fact that they are not aligned with one particular religion or another but can create an inclusive environment for local people.

Obviously, our experience would be skewed because the people who come to us for help or advice or legal assistance would be people who are opposing a new faith academy in their area, but I would say that there is just as much evidence to suggest or as many reasons to say that, where religious providers are coming in to run schools, they are disconnected from the local community because there is often a lot of local community opposition that has no outlet and has no influence on the outcome of a decision, for example, to designate a school with a faith ethos or not. At least it can go both ways, and at most there is no evidence to suggest that the premise of your question is correct.

Reverend Chalke: I would simply say to Andrew I think that faith, a Christian faith in my case, gives me and all of our people a commitment to being in a local community. I totally agree that it can be inspired elsewhere, but embedded in the Christian faith is a commitment to local community.

Paul Barber: Could I try to deal with the last question directly? The characteristic I mentioned about the community out of which the school grows is not necessarily something that is only applicable to organised religion. There is a community that is not just about current parents, but a wider community locally that is committed to good education for all. Out of that, a good school can grow. That would be the message that I would take.

Obviously churches have a little bit of an advantage because they already have those communities that are based on values and are committed to education for all and not just solely made up of current parents, but that does not preclude others creating those communities or other communities like that that exist being tapped into as part of the education system.

Q290 **Ian Mearns:** Prior to the rise of multi-academy trusts and local government, like everything else, there was a patchwork quilt: some very good educational authorities providing good school improvement services, and others, I am afraid to say, not so good. In the new territory that we are in with the Government quite clearly wanting to see as many schools as possible going down the route of being an academy, what role do you see local authorities playing as MATs increase in number and size?



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David Wilson: Clearly it is not the responsibility it was, but I think there is a residual responsibility that they have. For me it would be about the sufficiency of places, first, within their area and how they commission that. Secondly, I think it is an administrative responsibility for admissions. Thirdly, it should be non-regulatory, because you already have RSCs, Ofsted and the School Adjudicator, all regulating schools. To add another responsible regulator within all that is going to cause even more confusion. There is already confusion about the role of RSCs, which I think probably needs a clarification as it moves forward. I do not think further camouflage around who is responsible for what would be very welcome.

Q291 **Ian Mearns:** You are absolutely right because, while RSCs have been established, the rules and responsibilities of local government in respect to school improvement and school standards have not been disestablished, have they?

David Wilson: All that does need sorting out. There does need to be a template that says, "Here is who is doing what and here is how it is going to be done".

Reverend Genders: Just to add to what David is saying—he has got absolutely the fundamental part of that spot-on—the difficulty is that we are in a period of transition. It would be fine if everything was in an academy and we were very clear about whose responsibility was what, and the local authority maintained that role of provision of places and co-ordinating admissions or whatever.

The difficulty is that we are in this period of transition where, for some local authorities, they have pretty much said, "We don't exist to do any of this any more", and for others they are still taking a substantial role in many of those school improvement areas. It is the confusion about that transition process that is difficult, but if we get to the point where we are very clear about it, then we need to make sure that we have built a system. At the moment, the whole of the academy legislation, for instance, depends on the existent of a maintained sector because it relates to the maintained sector in most of its definition.

If we are getting to a point where we have full academisation, not only does the role of the local authority change, but the whole legislative framework needs to change because it no longer has a reference point back into the maintained sector, so it is really complicated on that basis.

Q292 **Ian Mearns:** Would you all welcome a continuing role of the local authority to be an honest broker in terms of admissions policy?

Reverend Genders: The co-ordination of admissions. Clearly, the provision of places is something that needs to be done at larger than just a multi-academy trust level. There needs to be somebody who has that bigger oversight.



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Paul Barber: Just to mention two other areas that need to be wider than the individual schools and academies and relate to more vulnerable groups. Of course, special educational needs and school transport are linked to each other, in a way, as two other areas where there needs to be a local co-ordination that is broader than the schools themselves.

Q293 **Ian Mearns:** Increasingly, though, as well, we have all seen some practice where schools are displacing pupils, so do you see an important role for local authorities in terms of displaced pupils?

David Wilson: There is quite a strong code on admissions, which you must and should do. I would be willing to believe that out there may be a small number of schools that play fast and loose with that. If they are playing fast and loose with it, then the School Adjudicator needs to take them to task and the RSC needs to remove the governing body, because they are responsible for that. I do not think we should punish the innocent and I do not think we should put a local authority infrastructure in place just to meet the aberrations of a few schools.

Andrew Copson: Whether it is local authority-provided or not, the need for somebody to regulate and to monitor admissions is growing all the time and it is growing in particular with the deregulation of admissions in relation to academies that acquire religious character or have a religious character. Recently the Office of the School Adjudicator found widespread noncompliance with the admissions code among religious schools.

If we are in a position where 2,000 schools within our system, which have previously been voluntary-controlled, are now moving to a situation where they may select on religious grounds, to have that in place without someone monitoring and implementing admissions codes at some level would be completely mad. Religious selection in our state system accounts for more socioeconomic sorting in the education system than grammar schools and independent schools combined. If that grows by 2,000 schools over the course of the full academisation of the sector, then that is going to lead to socioeconomic segregation in the system of a sort that we just have not seen before.

Reverend Chalke: Just to add to the list of things that I think local authorities do provide, still for Oasis we do not always have the resources to provide educational psychologists, for instance, and we work with our local authorities on that. Sometimes we cannot come up with SEN provisions, and we always want to work with the local authority where they can provide that. We think local authorities are great. We want to work alongside them. Also, their co-ordination of multi-agency support for the most vulnerable children. They have an essential role to play in that that no multi-academy trust could ever do. That is important.

One of our recommendations in the paper we sent in, Ian, simply says this, one sentence: "Oasis recommends a review of services currently provided by local authorities, national review, and for the government to



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outline their strategy to ensure the consistent and effective delivery of services." I agree with what Nigel says. It is so patchy, it is confusing.

Q294 **Ian Mearns:** We have had some discussion in the Committee before. Do you see a role for local authorities in terms of establishing their own multi-academy trusts?

Reverend Chalke: I can only speak for Oasis's point of view around that. There is a huge question that is multifaceted, but I would agree with what Nigel I think said. In the end, I do not think Oasis believes that academies are the silver bullet. Good education is about good systems, good structure, clear vision, clear training and great teachers delivering, and any system under which you can organise that is going to produce a result.

Reverend Genders: I would say directly no to your question because I think that the complexity of the kind of conflict of interest that that would encourage is so vast that it would be very difficult for a local authority to be the honest broker in terms of admissions or in the provision of school places and also be running an operation that has to be viable in terms of its own future. It would just cloud the water too much in that case.

Reverend Chalke: Although the thing is, because a MAT is self-governing in the end, set up under the DfE's guidelines, that trust that was created by the local authority would stand apart from it. That is why my answer was it is highly complex to the question you asked.

Q295 **Ian Mearns:** In response to Nigel's point, I am not here to give evidence, but there are lots of examples within local authorities, not just in education, where glass walls and ceilings exist that separate different functions.

Reverend Chalke: Yes. Hatton is a good example.

Q296 **Suella Fernandes:** Don't you think there is already a conflict when you have local authority-maintained schools and they are already the admissions manager and also the regulator or the accountability?

Paul Barber: I think that has been a problem within the system, and they have been finding out what the role of local authorities will be in the future, because there has been a lot of talk about honest broker, commissioner and so on, and we would support those moves, but there has been historically a fundamental conflict when the local authority has been both honest broker and one of the providers. As the other providers, we have very good, long relationships with the local authorities, and very good ones in most cases, but there still is that underlying tension that you cannot entirely get rid of if those two functions both belong to the local authority.

Q297 **Ian Mearns:** With things like admissions, Paul, the voluntary-aided schools are their own admissions authority, although they have it administered by—



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Paul Barber: Absolutely. They are their own admission authority, and going back to what I said before—

Q298 **Ian Mearns:** They conduct their own appeals, for instance.

Paul Barber: Absolutely, and that has not changed in the conversion from voluntary-aided to academy. The co-ordination function works very well in many authorities but there are tensions in some, because sometimes co-ordination can creep into something more than co-ordination.

The bigger tensions historically have lain in the area of provision of places. Where expansion is needed, where do those places go? With the best will in the world, if a local authority is making those decisions and it has to make the decisions where the money goes, and it has its own schools and it has other schools, there are going to be those tensions there even in the best-run local authority.

Q299 **Chair:** If we end up in a world with academies being the dominant provider of education, would you suggest then that the role of the local authority should be redefined perhaps more precisely and expressed through legislation? That is general agreement, then?

David Wilson: Can I just explain a bit further than that? I think there needs to be a definition of RSC as well within all that because the two have some bearing on each other.

Ian Mearns: At the moment you see people parking tanks on each other's lawns quite a lot, don't you?

Q300 **Chair:** Yes. This Committee has already reported on RSCs, but of course that is an ongoing job, in a sense, because the role is changing as academies are becoming numerous, as MATs are becoming more numerous, and there is an issue about capacity and so forth as well. Obviously the role of the RSCs becomes increasingly important as there are more academies. Your relationship with RSCs at the moment: is that where you would expect it to be, or what would you like it to become?

Reverend Genders: I spoke to this Committee when you were doing that inquiry about RSCs. Following that and subsequently, we produced a memorandum of understanding about how the RSCs or the diocese of the church and the DfE work. It is really helpful and it makes it very clear about who is doing what and what the responsibilities are, and we found that a really positive experience. It is bringing the kind of consistency that we asked for at the time.

Paul Barber: Similarly, it is early days and the system is evolving, but certainly the conversations are taking place. They are very positive and the partnerships are growing locally as well as nationally.

Andrew Copson: This is a general question picking up on what you have just asked about RSCs and the role of local authorities. There is a big question as an umbrella over all of that, which is whether or not it is



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appropriate for an education system to develop piecemeal in this way, including through memoranda of understanding with providers and the DfE that affect provision on the ground, with no parliamentary scrutiny whatsoever. Never debated by the Houses of Parliament, never discussed.

Q301 **Chair:** You are participating in parliamentary scrutiny right now, but I take your point.

Andrew Copson: Of the legislation.

Chair: Yes. The legislation is scrutinised, but again I take your point because it is incremental changes. I am busy writing an article talking about that as a characteristic of education policies of the last 50 years. That is obviously one of the problems that emerges from time to time, and it is certainly at the core of this debate.

Thank you all very much indeed for coming along today. Our proceedings have come to an end.