
“Mechanics and dynamics: Evolving your MAT governance to optimise effectiveness to meet the emerging new governance policy climate”

Optimus MATs Summit

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Agenda

- Where had governance policy climate got to pre-election?
- What is the new governance climate post-election?
- Case study: Delta Academies Trust – a journey to effective governance
- Provocation: how do MATs deliver effective governance and meet the challenges/opportunities arising from the new government?
- Discussion & questions

Where had the governance policy climate got to pre-election?

Perspectives on what good governance specifically looks like in MATs had evolved particularly rapidly in the last 12-18 months

Academies Regulatory and Commissioning Review (April 2023) set out a framework for increasing the impact of the academies system

Commissioning decisions by Regional Directors based on “trust quality” criteria and local requirements:

- High quality and Inclusive Education
- School Improvement
- Workforce
- Finance and Operations
- Governance and Leadership

Where had the governance policy climate got to pre-election?

(cont.)

- Sector publishes the Academy Trust Governance Code - set out the principles, desired outcomes, and recommended practice for effective governance.
- DfE withdrew the Governance Handbook replacing it with two new governance guides, one of which was a specific Academy Trust Governance Guide.
- Academy Trust Governance Guide moved away from the core six functions of governance to use a new set of functions of trust governance – strategic leadership, accountability & assurance and strategic engagement.

What is the new governance climate post-election?

Labour party election manifesto almost entirely silent on the question of how school system should develop.

Since the election, SoS for Education's mantra has been to focus on "standards, not structures":

- Teacher pay, recruitment and retention
- Curriculum and assessment
- SEND, inclusion and mental health
- Inequality and the cost of living

Key policies that government hopes to pass in its Children's Wellbeing Bill.

What is the new governance climate post-election? (cont.)

But (disjointed) policy announcements in relation school system are being made:

Academies

- Academy conversion grants scrapped from 1 January 2025.
- No plans for future rounds of the Trust Capacity Fund or Trust Establishment and Growth Fund.
- ESFA set to close by 31 March 2025 and role will be integrated into the DfE's Regions Groups.
- Updated DfE intervention guidance – Support and intervention in schools – statutory guidance for support and intervention action in schools (November 2024).
- Latest edition of ATH - *“The department will engage with the sector in developing its approach to trust-level intervention, including the process to be followed by RG and the evidence that they will rely on to determine the strength of trustees’ oversight of educational performance”*.

What is the new governance climate post-election? (cont.)

Ofsted

- Softening the harder edges of accountability.
- Replacing single-word Ofsted judgements with a report card system to describe how schools are performing.
- Inspections from September 2025 – consultation on report cards including area insights to reflect child's local experience, possible inclusion criteria, safeguarding finding; annual safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling reviews.

What is the new governance climate post-election? (cont.)

Local Authorities and new school improvement offer

- New Regional Improvement for Standards & Excellence (RISE) teams will be commissioning support for weaker schools from trusts, LAs and federations.
- Expert teams to work with schools in response to the areas for improvement identified in Ofsted report cards.
- The RISE teams of civil servants and advisers will be sent to help schools deemed to be struggling before a decision is made on any potential change of governance.
- N.B. Will appointed Advisers be experts in governance as well as in the delivery of academic, and financial improvements?
- LAs potentially taking on more responsibility for school oversight and accountability.
- SoS is “open to considering” struggling academies returning to LA oversight.

So where are we at?

- Now in a period of real uncertainty as to an overall plan or strategy for where schools system might be headed, and the role of effective governance in this.

Thank you

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A Journey to effective Governance

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In the beginning.....

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Personal MAT experience

- ▲ December 2014 – Joined the Board of SPTA
- ▲ December 2015 – Led Trust-wide enquiry into Trust Governance
- ▲ December 2015 - Elected as Chair of Board of Trustees

Reality sets in

- ▲ Christmas 2015 – CEO retires, Founding Members and Trustees resign

Reality of role and responsibility

- ▲ Summoned to meetings RSC (RD)
- ▲ Summoned to meeting with Under SoS for Schools (Lord Nash)
- ▲ Trust in both education and media spotlight for wrong reasons
- ▲ Trust reputation destroyed
- ▲ Personally accountable
- ▲ Decision maker
- ▲ Everyone looks at, and to, YOU
- ▲ What do you do?

A Chair's inheritance

- △ Trust governance and finances
 - Four Non-exec
 - Two Execs – Acting CEO and CFO (AO)
- △ Three non-exec
- △ Three non-exec also Members
- △ CCO/ Company Secretary
- △ Circa £20 million deficit by 2018/ 19
- △ Where am I personally?
- △ Where is the Trust?
- △ What have I found and what needs doing?
- △ Where, and what, next?

My Personal Vision



Why did I become a School Governor?

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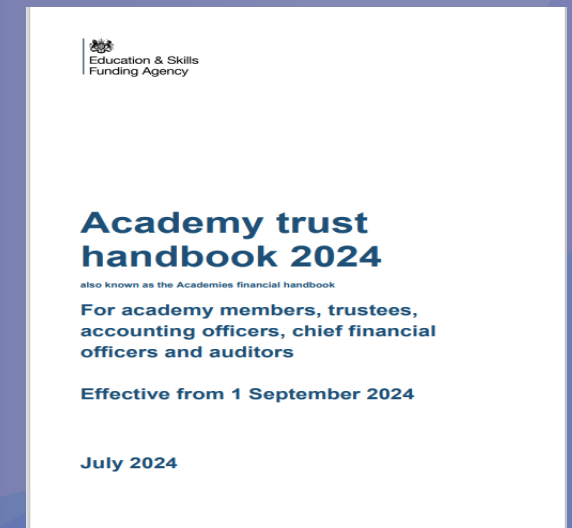
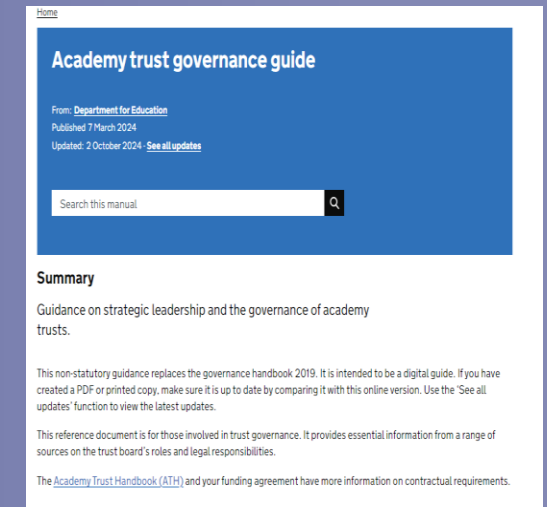
Who has responsibility for Governance?

△ Government view

- Essential element of school leadership
- Ethical, effective and accountable structure of oversight
- Ultimately responsible for performance of school/ Trust

△ Personal view

- Demands that leaders improve outcomes and life chances for children
- Drives ethos and culture of schools and Trusts
- Properly hold leaders to account for educational and financial performance



Two strands of effective governance

Executive Governance

- ▲ Curriculum Delivery
- ▲ Teaching and learning
- ▲ Safeguarding
- ▲ Holding colleagues to account for individual performance
- ▲ Measuring outcomes
- ▲ Not exhaustive and delivery of much, much more

Non-Executive Governance

- ▲ Strategic/ being aspirational
- ▲ Acting in concert with stakeholders
- ▲ Clarity of role and responsibility
- ▲ Performance management of Head/ CEO
- ▲ Ensuring financial efficiency
- ▲ Delivering statutory responsibilities
- ▲ Being supportive and challenging

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Trust Board role in delivering Trust-wide change programme

- ▲ Leading the drive for whole school and trust change
- ▲ Changing the ethos and culture to ensure Trust improvement
- ▲ Robust challenge of false assumptions and pre-conceptions
- ▲ Determination to analyse whole school and trust data, financial benchmarking and scrutinising information that is presented
- ▲ Holding all school and trust leaders to account for performance at all levels
- ▲ Remaining compliant throughout and always acting in best interests of pupils

Impact on stakeholders

- ▲ Stakeholder contentment and reputational security
- ▲ Delivery of sustainable and impactful school and trust improvement
- ▲ Open, honest and transparent accountability at all levels
- ▲ Creation of informed parental choice leading to increased pupil numbers and financial sustainability
- ▲ Opportunity to promote proven system leadership to wider education sector
- ▲ Improve communities and deliver greater opportunities for pupils and staff to flourish
- ▲ Become part of wider transformational change to education, and the environment, for the future

Delta Academies Trust today

- ▲ One of the most improved and highest achieving Trusts in the country
- ▲ Accountable at every level of the organisation
- ▲ Increased pupil numbers supporting viability and stability
- ▲ Increased capacity created to accommodate growth in advance of need
- ▲ Seen as one of the foremost Trusts demonstrating embedded school improvement
- ▲ Delivering on its vision to change educational outcomes across the north of England

Why did we do all of this?



Billy Miggins

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Discussion

How do MATs deliver effective governance and meet the challenges/opportunities arising from the new government?

Thank you



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