

Making Education Groups Work



Second Edition
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Introduction

A seminar from my teacher training days came to mind as I began editing these excellent essays. It was 25 years ago at the Department of Education at Cambridge University. Rex Walford, who many readers of this publication will recall, suggested that we, his students, would have a variety of careers during our lives. He didn't mean only within teaching. I often wonder where the other students in the seminar are today. I know that one has been in a senior role in a secondary school for several years and expect that others, like me, have changed careers entirely.

Running a group of schools demands a different management style, a great confidence and skill in delegation and the need for effective communication.

There have been many changes in education since 1994 and in the 75 years since the 1944 Education Act, which will be the inspiration for a subsequent Wild Research publication. 25 years ago, and indeed

75 years ago, the career path for an ambitious teacher was to progress to headship and, in time, to move to a larger school. Today, the age at which headteachers are appointed is lower and the career duration may well, due to changes in pensions and life expectancy, be longer. There is also the opportunity, seen through a number of contributors to this publication, to progress from running a school to running a group of schools. It is a very different role which will almost certainly mean not teaching and more travel between schools. Running a group of schools demands a different management style, a great confidence and skill in delegation and the need for effective communication with boards, the central team, school leaders, staff and pupils. There are benefits and burdens of creating and leading a group.

This publication seeks to offer perspectives from those who have successfully led and developed groups, not only academy trusts but also commercial groups of colleges. It includes insights from headteachers who have become chief executives and from operations directors. Each essay will, I hope, serve as a useful guide to those currently considering or developing a group of schools and provide some advice on what to do and what to avoid!

Sharing Resources, Securing Success (2017), a collection of essays on the same themes, forms the basis for this collection. Former Education Select Committee Chair Neil Carmichael, now Chair of the Pearson Commission on Life, Skills and the Changing Economy, draws on his experiences through a variety of contexts in education. Libby Nicholas, Claire-Marie Cuthbert, Clare Flintoff and Rachel De Souza have all established both successful and expanding academy trusts.

Aatif Hassan chairs two education groups which encompass schools, colleges and tutoring businesses, some focusing on Special Educational Needs. Victoria Heath and Mike Everett oversee the operations for an academy trust and a commercial colleges group respectively and draw on their prior experience in other sectors to assess how education groups can benefit from them.

The opportunity to run a MAT or group will not appeal to all heads.

The question of leadership of groups is of particular interest to those of us who advise boards on appointing chief executives and other members of the leadership teams. Some boards of academy trusts remain committed to appointing educational leaders. This can often make sense when a trust is formed from a lead school and where its head becomes the group chief executive. However, the opportunity to run a MAT or group will not appeal to all heads. The ability to establish credibility with boards, teachers, parents and students is essential and this may come more easily for those who have taught and led schools. However, during my 15 years of advising on senior appointments across a range of sectors, I have often seen the leadership skills and experience of an individual applied with success and results in a new sector. This is an easier proposition in finance and operations roles than in the chief executive one, but there is clearly scope for someone who has helped to developed a group through these two key functional areas to step up into running their current group or another?

Where key decisions are made – and by whom – illustrates the importance of governance. Some high profile groups during recent years have been feted by the Department for Education as exemplars of good practice yet their ambitions for growth and success have not always been matched by educational outcomes and effective financial management. Ensuring that groups have a recognised and respected brand and profile will only be sustainable if they can demonstrate to their funders – whether the state or fee paying parents – that they are adding value and providing a better education than their neighbours or competitors. At the same time, schools will only want to join such groups if they can show similar evidence of success, that sharing resources provides better outcomes than remaining independent.

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As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the questions raised by our contributors will be asked by politicians, educationalists and parents. I hope that this publication will be a modest yet helpful contribution to the effort to raise standards and improve the quality of education and that you will enjoy reading it.

Edward Wild

Founder and Director of Wild Search

Building the Crown

Aatif Hassan

Like many ‘edupreneurs’, the back story to forming an education group was hugely personal for me. Growing up with dyslexia, I had to find my own way to succeed and the encouragement and support of both my family and school (St James Independent School, where I now serve as a governor) was crucial. I wanted to give others the chance to succeed against the odds and in the face of obstacles. I had lost my mother at a young age and went on to lose my young first son. These losses, combined with involvement in a triple fatality car accident, meant the value of life and its potential had a whole new meaning for me. Giving young people the confidence and self-esteem in a values-based education was what we set out to do. In simple terms, doing what we love and ensuring all around us had the same vision.

Having this clarity of vision was vital. The mechanics of funding, business operations and finding great staff who were aligned to this vision all seemed to fall into place. We used the analogy of a house: without foundations of the house, (in our case ‘our purpose’), which largely stay invisible and below the surface, the shape of

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the building cannot be determined. The passion and excitement had to be communicated from the foundations. We wrote a culture book, Building The Crown. We invited staff to a series of dinners to reinforce the message. We also ran a number of workshops in both the UK and abroad. Two examples include our senior leadership trips to Tuscany, to study Italian artistic 16th century Renaissance; and to the Normandy beaches, where

Our job was ensuring a dual purpose: maintaining business discipline and remaining true to our ideals.

examples of many, many soldiers gave a whole new meaning to life. In Force for Good, the Dalai Lama says companies need compassion and moral dimension. Our job was

ensuring a dual purpose: maintaining business discipline and remaining true to our ideals.

Our Managing Director (MD) was the critical appointment. S/he was going to become custodian of the brand and its values. We took our time. We didn't feel a traditional recruitment process would work for many reasons. I wanted to get closer to potential candidates and really understand personal motivations. Something deeper that was moving them. In the same way, I was driven to create something, I wanted someone who shared our educational passions. Working with Edward Wild, we needed to articulate not only the vision but the scale of our ambition. Through a series of informal 'coffee' meetings, always in what was to become the MD's office, as I wanted to imagine the candidate in situ, we met a number of people from a variety of backgrounds. Educational experience was helpful but not essential. Empathy, integrity, emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial flair for education were more important. Could they motivate headteachers? A shared vision and work-hard mentality was crucial. In the end, the stand out candidate interview was short, as after a few minutes it was abundantly clear there was a compelling match. Even more impressively, we had not even got to the notion of money. We were always happy to pay above market rates for the right person, but we had both decided we were going to build something together and sorting technicalities out, was detail. (Important detail but not going to get in the way!) We then had a long and carefully planned induction programme, which allowed the MD to meet each member of the team both in a social and business setting.

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The essential ingredient that makes a great chief executive is balance. An educational background brings

significant depth of knowledge of the classroom and if they have held many other roles in a school, it gives credibility to the team. However, that being said, a candidate from a non-educational background brings ideas from outside the sector and a perspective on how to do things differently. As Steve Jobs said, "think different". Typically for a business to succeed, it has to outperform its competition. Doing exactly the same as the competition does not help. Most of the private sector providers are, interestingly, led by leaders from outside of teaching. At the time of writing, this is true for Cognita, Study Group, Minerva Education, Cambridge Education Group, Alpha Plus, Astrum Education, Wishford Schools, Inspired and ISP.

As well as a successful MD, there are certain strategic factors rather than financial circumstances which have led to an acceleration of central services provision. Schools and colleges can operate like mini kingdoms. The head teacher is effectively the Chief Executive of their empire and to the customer, the key person. And we have encouraged this. Our structure is

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fundamentally flat. Having worked with The British Army and PwC, we decided to do the opposite to

them. We have a concept of 'board to floor in no more than four'. This means from the board of directors to the teachers on the ground, there is no more than four levels. For this to work, it requires a huge level of trust. The central team see themselves as servants - we serve our schools. We do not see it as the schools report to us. Our role is to help the head teachers by removing obstacles to enable them to do what they do best and provide a steady platform from which to operate. The business of education is the preserve of the head teacher. However, finance, marketing, HR, compliance and property can be served with more senior resources and more effectively centrally.

Whilst our evidence is that there are not necessarily huge cost synergies, it is more about getting the best people in the best roles. An individual school or college may not be able to afford a Finance Director (FD) with many years of experience to do the finances whilst the group can easily manage and afford such resources.

The group function is small and focussed with experts from their field.

That being said, our model is effectively de-centralised. The group function is small and focussed with experts from their field. This ensures greater ownership, responsibility and better decision making. The headteacher and senior teachers know their market and should be empowered as much as possible.

With the growth of the group, definitely and rightfully, central costs have expanded. Our platform now has the ability to take on more schools and colleges without significant addition overhead.

Some schools employ a Chief Operating Officer (COO) that has a mandate to manage services, but we do not function in this way. The role of COO effectively exists between the MD and FD instead. However, we have a strong culture to share. Our incentive models promote the sharing culture as we incentivise our senior team with group-wide equity and company performance related bonuses rather than at individual site level. We also have outstanding data, which is shared weekly. Our senior team meet briefly every week and for longer sessions less frequently. Sharing the best ideas is an essential part of those meetings.

The delegation of the role of COO to the MD and FD does not hinder efficiencies or raise costs. Cost efficiencies can be a difficult concept in schools. They can be seen negatively. The reality is about allocation of resources. In our home lives, we make cost efficiencies daily and make decisions on what sort of holiday, car or home improvements we will do based on costs. The school is no different. Delivering cost efficiencies can mean that funding can be better deployed elsewhere to boost outcomes for all.

Centralisation of services is essential for future growth. A group needs an identity otherwise it is just a collection of assets pulled together. The identity is its common purpose, values and ways of doing things.

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We developed the concept of love of learning. Everyone is a learner, even head office. Many of our staff are studying A-levels in subjects they did not take at A-level or degree. When members of head office lead from the front, it unifies the team and drops the natural divide between head office and schools. That's what binds the group and having this, facilitates greater communication between schools. We particularly encourage peer-to-peer

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discussions through head teacher forums and meetings.

Why operate on your own when you can collaborate with likeminded people?

Schools should share their knowledge and expertise with other schools and colleges. This is the future. Why operate on your own when you can collaborate with likeminded

people? We have found sharing of policies, resources, people, buildings and knowledge to be immensely useful. For example, our university admission consulting, which employs experts in Oxbridge, US universities and medicine regularly supports our sixth form colleges with university and careers events. Our summer school curriculum has been influenced by academic experts in our colleges. They in turn have supported our consultancy with events. We could carry on with a list for a long time.

This follows into the belief that there is not an optimal number of institutions in our group. Having built a distinctive culture from our common purpose and clearly communicated it through our various mediums, we do not believe there is an optimum size. At least we are far from it. The concept of sharing has become normal and part of everyday practice. Why should it not continue?

Managing the Centre

Edward Wild in conversation with Mike Everett

As an experienced Chief Operating Officer (COO) of businesses in different sectors, perhaps you could share some insights into how you are securing and developing key staff within Study Group.

We are a complex business with multiple campuses and a global sales operation which means we need a mix of business and education expertise. We've made moves to strengthen both in the last couple of years. We've also spent time and effort identifying existing members of staff within our campuses who we believe have the potential to develop and take on more responsibility. In my experience there is 'un-tapped' potential which if we can identify and harness has a very powerful positive impact as it sends a strong signal to the organisation that there is room to grow and also makes it clear the types of attitudes and behaviours that we are trying to promote and that they get rewarded. As a result of this focus, the number of internal promotions has increased in the last couple of years, including the most recent of our Finance Director (FD) to become Chief Executive.

How does the division between the central functions and those at local/campus level work?

The majority of non-educational services are provided centrally.

We are moving to a structure where the majority of non-educational services are provided centrally, with our campuses then concentrating on delivering the best possible education. As a diverse group with 21 campuses in the UK and Europe, recruiting students from over 100 countries, (which itself is part of our wider organisation with campuses in Australia, New Zealand and North America) we believe this is the most efficient structure. This process has involved the setting up of a global admissions hub in Singapore.

To what extent have financial considerations led to an acceleration of central services provision or have wider strategic factors been the driving factor?

The driver has been both efficiency and effectiveness – with the aim of delivering a better service at a lower cost. We are also trying to build more resilience into the business.

As a COO you clearly bring wide experience of leading and overseeing multi-site operations. What is the approach you take to ensure that each business unit functions most effectively?

In our structure we have clearly split the internal management of the business (my role as COO) from the external management of partners and stakeholders (the role of our MD). We then have college principals and heads running our campuses. These campuses vary in size from under 100 students to 1,000.

The key challenge is to create a structure where our principals and campus heads feel, and act, empowered to drive the best possible outcomes for our students. The reality is that this can be a real

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challenge with the perception by some individuals in our campuses that some centralised services are ‘bureaucratic’ and ‘cumbersome’. The key is to ensure that central services, and their teams, are as responsive to local needs as possible and that local campuses understand the value and importance of being part of a larger organisation. The ‘mind-set’ of leaders and their teams is crucial in this and we spend time trying to ensure that people understand the challenges that different parts of the organisation have.

One area where we’ve made substantial progress is in governance, where the value of the outside expertise, through our Bellerbys College Advisory Board external members, has delivered substantial benefits for our Bellerbys Colleges. In our University Pathway business, our central Teaching and Learning team has provided huge value to each individual campus in preparation for their QAA audits.

In conclusion, Study Group are very willing and keen to engage with other schools and colleges – both public and privately funded - to learn and contribute to their thinking.

Building a School Chain

Dame Rachel De Souza

Resources. It's a dehumanising word, isn't it? It's an indistinct measure of stuff, of anything, that can be combined or split apart, re-parcelled towards the most efficient end. It's the kind of word that gets education campaigners up in arms, and sometimes rightly so. Where are the children in the conversations about funding agreements, rebrokering and management structures?

At the Inspiration Trust, and at most other academy groups, our young children are exactly where they should be: at the forefront of everyone's minds. Our finance chief looks at reserve percentages, at VAT returns, and all those other terms that make mere mortals glaze over but make accountants come alive – but she does so to ask how we can pay for a new library at one of our primary schools, fund our longer school day with otherwise inaccessible sport and arts activities, or employ an army of subject specialists to reinvigorate teaching across our Trust. They are a means, not an end.

We have been through the battles of creating academies, but perhaps have not done enough to explain why.

We are at something of a crossroads in education. We have been through the battles of creating academies, but perhaps have not done enough to explain why. It is not because we love the legal structures of MATs. It is because too many schools had

got stuck in a rut: talented teachers and leaders unable to break out of the strangling structures of local government. Too many children got held back by the same strictures.

Academies are not about recreating that. We have an approach that works at the Inspiration Trust – the official league tables have twice ranked us as the top performing comprehensive schools group for pupil progress to GCSE – but that doesn't mean that everyone should copy our organogram. Learn from us by all means, but education should never be about creating automatons, whether in the classroom, the staffroom, or the boardroom.

Our efficient centralised structure for administering the nuts and bolts of our schools has similar challenges and dilemmas to any large organisation: coming together allows fewer, better focused, people to deliver the same

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for less, but risks becoming detached from the front line. We combat that by staying fluid: our structures are not fixed and we have not been afraid to evolve as the situation demands. Short-term secondments sharpen our staff's

skills and ensure a wide appreciation of potentially competing concerns across the organisation: principals take on roles across the Trust, so there is less 'us and them' tension.

The concern I see in the months ahead is the potential for education to get stuck again on structures: as MATs mature and some – sadly – fail, we get into the mire of focusing on system issues rather than the human failings that can occur regardless of structure. It is a circle of diminishing returns, when we need instead to be championing the opportunity for developing new ideas and approaches. We need to be happy that they will not be right for everyone – and in some cases may not succeed long term.

We took a gamble opening the UK's first maths and science specialist sixth form in Norwich. We were told it wasn't needed, wouldn't work, and to add to the madness decided that converting a historic city centre fire station to house it was the best idea. Today, the Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form is flourishing: its numbers are buoyant, its academic results are excellent, and the building an architectural delight. That doesn't mean everyone should open a specialist sixth form, but we should all be emboldened to embrace our passions, to learn from history not to repeat it but to challenge and improve it.

It's an approach that we are applying to the classroom. Our reward for working together is the ability to invest in pioneering the development of a knowledge-rich curriculum. For those not familiar, in short this means acknowledging that to get on in the world our young people need a base of core knowledge, that is as natural to them as how to use WhatsApp or Instagram. It is not good enough – as some people say with a shrug of their shoulders – that now you can look everything up on Google, that ready mental access to facts is redundant. You can't have a fluid conversation in a foreign language by looking up every word in your phrase book; without a broad, shared, knowledge base we condemn our children to a Babel, where everything is a foreign language. No amount of 'twenty-first century skills', whatever their ever changing definition casts them as, can replace that.

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We have built a team of teaching and subject experts to work across our schools to support, develop, and train our teachers to get the very best out of every child, and to embed the concept of a knowledge-rich curriculum in every lesson. We are launching our own initial teacher training programme. It will take a little time, it will be expensive, and it will need us to work together. But it doesn't trouble our finance director any more than ensuring we pay the best price for our electricity bill, because she knows why we're doing it and knows it is essential.

What we are sharing is not resources, but inspiration. And it is that which will secure success – not for us, but for our young people.

Strength in Systems, Empowering Education

Clare Flintoff

What is the purpose of education? What does it mean to be educated? Educators are always keen to provide answers to these fundamental questions; answers that often reflect their particular bias - to be fully educated you need to go to university, you need to know a bank of knowledge that we have selected for you to memorise, or perhaps you just need to have plenty of “21st Century” skills and be proficient in your use of Google? As MATs we develop our own brand of solutions, things that we know work well. We have mechanisms to build on our best practice, share our ideas, disseminate our learning in every classroom and ideally achieve greater levels of success each year. Ultimately, and at every stage, our success is being measured on our young people’s results in tests at 11, 16 or 18 when there are few of us who would maintain that exam success is the purpose and meaning of education. The question is whether the MAT system is enabling us to get closer to the reason why we think we need to exist in the first place - does it help us to truly educate our young people? Is it doing the best job it can for every young person in this country and is it working towards creating a better future for all young people regardless of their background?

ASSET Education has equity as one of its core values. Working towards social justice is a key driver of what we do and how we do it. We see securing equity as one of the greatest challenges that we face in education and we know that our most vulnerable, disadvantaged pupils have a huge contribution to make to society but face barriers, discrimination and pressures that none of us would want for any child. Our leaders, staff and children have considered how and why we need to go beyond equality - providing equal opportunities for all children - and how striving for equity will put the individual child at the centre of our decision making and support. But we know we can’t fight this battle on our own. It is beyond the scope of just one MAT of 13 primary schools to ensure that each child’s personal and social circumstances, gender, family background, ethnic origin, are not acting as barriers to their educational achievement.

The question is whether the MAT system is enabling us to get closer to the reason why we think we need to exist in the first place.

We are living in challenging times. Our country seems to have lost its sense of direction. Our people are divided and even polarised in their views. We have, hopefully temporarily, lost sight of a vision that life will be better in the future. Values

such as independence, separation, self-government, difference are preferred to compassion, care, tolerance, collaboration and inclusion. And we are not alone, as this thinking is echoed across the world. Our education system often mirrors the larger political landscape - from the austere, punishing Victorian classrooms, with industrialisation and the training of the young to form a skilled but obedient, compliant, disciplined workforce through to the more liberal thinking of the 1960's and 1970's and the lack of rigour, relaxing of rules but often innovative, maverick approaches with almost no accountability. Today the system is centrally driven with high accountability. Market values have created the potential for success or failure, and schools, in MATs, are being run as businesses in competition with each other. Young people are excluded when they don't fit and become someone else's problem. We have separated ourselves into groups reflecting those independent, exclusive values and it is the most vulnerable who are at greatest risk.

Within the political vacuum created by Brexit, perhaps we have an opportunity as educationalists to come together, to re-think our purpose and *raison d'être* and to work towards the greater good for all of our young people. We are being encouraged by our inspectorate to place less importance on test results and to measure success against a wider brief and we need to seize this opportunity. We need to fundamentally review the demands placed on our workforce as well as our students. We need to remind ourselves that success is about the whole person and involves mental, physical, social and emotional balance. We need a longer-term perspective, to free ourselves of short-term objectives and gains, and in order to get there we crucially need to pool our resources and talent.

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Successful MATs have proved that they can be so much more effective than the local authority maintained system. We now need MAT to work with MAT in the spirit of collaboration, celebrating their differences, growing and sharing their expertise, supporting each other when things are challenging or difficult. Our young people only get one chance at their education so there can be no space within our system for schools or students to fail.

Working towards equity we understand and recognise that the challenge is greater in some areas of our system and some parts of our country. With social justice as our ultimate aim we need to fully recognise the difficulties and support the most vulnerable. If the sum is greater than its individual parts within a MAT, it is a logical progression to suggest that the educational establishment will be strengthened when MATs are working collaboratively towards a common goal.

As the Chief Executive of a successful MAT my responsibility has been to ensure success in its widest sense for every individual child in each of our schools. I now accept the added responsibility to work towards an educational system where collaboration between MATs is improving outcomes for every child, recognising diversity and celebrating difference and most importantly is supporting the most vulnerable so that no one can fail. We need to join, MAT with MAT, school with school, to show that we value collaboration more than competition, that we want our most vulnerable young people to succeed, that children wherever they live and whatever their background deserve the very best education with no child or school left behind.

Evolving Education

Claire-Marie Cuthbert

The world around us is changing rapidly, not least for the children and young people we serve. For them, it is a world of growing and exciting opportunities, but also one that presents some unprecedented challenges. In order to thrive, our children will not only need to be highly literate, but they will also need to be healthy, adaptable, resilient, and confident lifelong learners – embracing change and knowing that, through hard work, they can and will succeed.

To ensure we prepare them well for this changing world, school leaders, teachers and other educationalists need to work together.

To ensure we prepare them well for this changing world, school leaders, teachers and other educationalists need to work together. We must – through ongoing research, professional development, school-to-school support, and sharing of best practice – create an education system

that will enable children and young people to thrive and succeed both now and in their future lives. That requires us to break down the barriers – across schools, trusts and localities – to learn from one another and invest time and energy in helping all schools to adapt and succeed, to the benefit of all children and young people.

The Evolve Trust is a small geographically local-based MAT in Mansfield. Mansfield's education system is – like all parts of England – experiencing significant flux. 32% of schools in Mansfield are academies and fall within five academy trusts operating within the town. There is significant fragmentation and isolation within the system and so far there have only been eight primaries within the town who have converted to academy status. Mansfield does not – currently – benefit from the leadership or work of a designated teaching school. There are currently no deep school partnerships within the town that are focused on providing wide-scale teacher and leadership training and development, or co-ordinating school to school support.

Mansfield's success depends on attracting and retaining the best leaders and teachers to serve its schools. The education system is currently facing a challenging time for recruitment as the economy grows, competition for graduate-educated employees increases, school places (particularly in the secondary sector) increase and pay lags behind other sectors. Mansfield is further hampered by a lack of a university within the town.

There remains a need to support and remain focused on how the town's future adults can prosper in a wide range of ways

Mansfield is also a town with significant pockets of disadvantage and worklessness. 14% of the schools are judged as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate', with two of the town's eleven secondary schools being judged

as 'inadequate'. Whilst the town's schools have generally improved in recent years, there remain significant concerns about how well children are prepared for the future. Unemployment is above the national average and there is a lack of local choice in terms of higher education offered within the town. Whilst the education system is focused on the performance of schools as judged by Ofsted and performance tables (and this is important), there remains a need to support and remain focused on how the town's future adults can prosper in a wide range of ways; drawing on the social capital of business, the third sector and community groups – as well as schools – to achieve this.

With this in mind, the Evolve Trust set about creating the Evolve Alliance. This is a strong and dynamic alliance of local and regional schools, with the professional courage to deliver the highest quality and most relevant learning experiences across all of our schools. The Alliance is passionate that leaders and all staff in schools need to model a system of collaboration and partnership, rather than pressure and competition. As education colleagues, there needs to be courage in setting curriculum and accountability systems that will give local children and young people the skills they will need both now and in the future, and to stay true to the legacy they want for the children and young people they serve.

We know from research that factors such as collaborating with peers and working with colleagues in other contexts, is not only highly motivating but also enables heads and school leaders to develop professionally and manage challenging times. It also provides the basis of trust and confidence required for deeper partnerships – such as peer review. At a time when the local authority's capacity for supporting schools to manage changes in policy and practice is dwindling (and as some MATs become very internally focused), it is important that schools and practitioners themselves take a lead in supporting one another to manage change and share practice.

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The Evolve Trust has taken the lead in developing rich professional networks across Mansfield and one of the key motivations behind the development of the alliance was a system that works together to achieve successful outcomes for all children in Mansfield. The self-improving system relies on schools and effective leaders working beyond the parameters of their own institutions to support the wider school landscape. At its heart is the notion that schools should work together to drive up standards for the benefit of all children.

More Than A Sum of Our Parts

Libby Nicholas

Being part of a MAT brings with it real benefits, and there is great truth in the maxim that we are more than the sum of our parts – and in the best MATs, many times more than the sum of their parts. Firstly, there are the very obvious economies of scale benefits: the purchasing power from iPads to Pritt Sticks, and the ability to pool back office functions and roles that are not unique to education. There is also a lot to be said for having a common ICT platform, providing the management information that we need as educators, as well as a genuinely accessible interface for parents, pupils and teachers alike.

And there are huge benefits too in terms of taking a system wide approach to school improvement, developing meaningful career paths for staff at all levels in the school, and recruiting across a group of schools for new staff, rather than picking off role by role and advertising each individually, at no inconsiderable cost.

But there is actually something more profound at play in successful MATs. And it's this: it's about a shared mindset; a shared set of values; and a shared belief in the way that collectively you can make a

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a shared set of values; and a
shared belief*

genuine and lasting difference to the lives of all of the children and young people in your care.

When you are a single school you are, quite rightly and understandably, quite inward looking, focused on what is going on in your school. When you are in a successful MAT, it is about a shared sense of responsibility – often in a geographically discrete area, as is the case with Astrea Academy Trust, where we started our journey as an organisation focusing on the South Yorkshire area.

We are a deeply values-led organisation. And our starting point was to define the qualities that we want to see in our pupils: resilience, empathy, aspiration, contribution and happiness. These are the values that go to the very heart of our organisation – they are just as applicable for our pupils, parents, classroom teachers, middle leaders, heads, regional education directors and all the way through to me as Chief Executive. It's simply not enough to demand that say, empathy, is a quality that you value. It has to be ever-present in everyday behaviours. And instilling that approach, began right on Day One. It was with this approach in mind that the board was constructed and indeed how I was appointed as Chief Executive. Having an education background was seen as absolutely essential to the success of Astrea Academy Trust as a brand new organisation.

It is undoubtedly true that the challenging financial environment for schools has concentrated minds considerably when it comes to MATs. However, that said, it makes eminent sense to provide central services across a family of schools – both to drive cost efficiencies, but also to embed the cultural benefits and

The challenging financial environment for schools has concentrated minds considerably when it comes to MATs.

shared values that underpin the most successful MATs. And whilst there can be initial costs involved in establishing these central services – school improvement, HR, ICT, estates, communications and so on – the savings that this approach delivers over time cannot be ignored.

In our experience, having an executive director take overall responsibility for managing these functions has been invaluable, and in itself can drive further continuous improvement and innovation in the way that these functions operate and are delivered across the family of schools.

Having been fully operational for over 2 years now, it is clear that such a centralised approach has been the driving force behind us maturing even more quickly as an organisation than we had anticipated. Our foundations have been dug deep, and as a result, we have a platform from which to grow further. Indeed, the latest phase of our development has seen our early successes in the South Yorkshire area further south into Cambridgeshire, where a number of schools have joined our family of schools.

Sustainability in Schools

Victoria Heath

The focus on sustainability is permeating through all areas of life, society and business. Having worked in sustainable investment for 12 years, I have an enhanced understanding of what this means in terms of the financial sector, various investor types and the plethora of relevant social, environmental and ethical issues that this encompasses. What does sustainability look like in the education sector? Is sustainability another transient issue that reflects a general zeitgeist of the age or is it here to stay?

Notably, UNESCO has included Education for Sustainable Development (ESDs) in their Sustainable Development Goals (2018), It cites:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, proportion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Whilst areas such as Global Citizenship and Sustainability in general have appeared in the National Curriculum, what does this mean for the operational side of a MAT?

There is a general consensus that funding for schools is diminishing. As resources are severely challenged, our focus must be on getting more for less and on making the most of what we have.

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Energy costs have increased exponentially this year. With no increased funding to cover the utility bills it is vital to take a clear and acute look at this and all other areas of spend, not only with a view to ameliorating the current challenges, but also with a medium and long term eye on sustainability generally.

Although most schools spend around 80% of their funding on staffing, there is still plenty of potential to review the remaining 20%. Looking at this one can peel away the layers to reveal possibilities that will shore up finances to be directed to the core focus of the education of pupils.

One of the first places to look is contracts. Any given school will have dozens, with any number of 'for profit' organisations all looking to make a profit and keep your business. The first step is knowing exactly what contracts are in place, with whom and then carrying out a forensic examination as to key metrics such as duration, service level agreement, monthly and annual cost/income, performance measures, where the supplier stands versus the competition, how well are they doing for you and whether you can terminate if needed.

My view is that a contractor/supplier will only do as well for you as you demand them to. It is human nature to react to how you are treated, and to the level of accountability demanded from you. With this in mind, regular communication and a focus on accountability is key to Key Performance Indicators being met and achieved.

Other aspects of contract management include intelligent procurement and contract management. I believe firmly in not signing multi-year contracts on the basis that if the suppliers are any good, it would be easier for us to continue using them and that this should be an indication from them, to me of their confidence in their ability to deliver. Forming and maintaining a good relationship and regular review meetings with suppliers keeps you at the head of the 'good service queue' and also allows changes and tweaks to be made to best serve the school development plan, and changing needs of stakeholders. In my experience, results will directly reflect the time and energy that you put into contracts.

Following on from this would be a root and branch audit of all non-salary related fixed costs. Assets have ongoing costs. At Bohunt Education Trust, we have formed a MAT Purchasing Group where we share information on

Other aspects of contract management include intelligent procurement and contract management.

suppliers and costs of everything from IT support (which is now group-wide) to consumables (wash room, printer and education supplies), and we are working towards gaining one supplier for all items at a preferential rate. Our initial research manifested a raft of different prices for the same items and from the same suppliers. This initiative alone will be incredibly effective in terms of saving resources and is a constant work in progress. At Bohunt Education Trust, we have already made huge savings by working together on areas as diverse as IT Support, IT hardware, software licences, refuse collection, by using the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) Framework, and washroom services. In terms of refurbishment, we have completely reviewed the procurement approach by using local highly rated tradespeople and have secured savings of 50%.

Even a printer audit across the organisation will uncover various individual legacy printers dotted around that are all consuming toner and other resources despite a repro room and other, larger, more efficient machines. Looking at encouraging responsible printing, and a generally joined up approach can in itself save money, paper, landfill and other time related servicing and equipment failure related costs, thereby securing both costs savings and environmental benefits.

Moving to buildings, there are so many things to look at relevant to sustainability, from light bulbs to solar and double-glazing. Perhaps less obviously, looking at things like floor surfaces and walls in terms of ease of cleaning, chemicals needed, the longevity of these items when complete replacement/refurbishment will be needed. Cleaning costs, the rental of special machinery and chemicals all serve to create a logjam in the efficient flow of resources, time and the aesthetics of the school. Every single item installed in a school or other building has a cost in cleaning, maintenance and its eventual replacement or disposal. A recent example of this is the time it takes to fill up soap dispensers, which of a certain capacity need to have a certain key used (different with each manufacturer) that creates a substantial time cost over and above the consumables. I recently found that cleaners spend many hours a month just filling up soap machines.

Returning to the core sustainability principles of environment, social and ethical. Not only is there an opportunity to echo what is being learned by students today but also to be active in the stewardship of valuable and diminishing resources.

Perhaps even more critically, the effective use of financial and other resources creates a clear path towards creating a responsible ethos of the business of schools and of acting as an example to our students. Our students are more aware now than ever of sustainability and challenges now and in the future, all of which will become more and more important as their lives progress.

‘Steady as she goes’ for MATs?

Professor Neil Carmichael

For five decades, several policy initiatives, including Tony Crosland’s circular 10/65 (comprehensive schools), Jim Callaghan’s Ruskin College Speech, Ken Baker’s 1988 Education Act, Tony Blair’s introduction of academies and Michael Gove’s turbo-boost to the academies programme, have all amounted to incremental pushes against the local authority system. The Secretary of State, Damian Hinds, has signalled a slower pace and scope for reform of schools, preferring to focus on already established priorities including social mobility, and retention and recruitment of teachers.

If MATs are, ultimately, the answer, the still outstanding question of their ‘supervision’ becomes critical

Local authorities are still in place but, in many cases, alongside MATs and, of course, individual academies. This raises two salient policy issues; the future purpose in education of the local authorities and the suitability of MATs to be deliverers of state education. If

MATs are, ultimately, the answer, the still outstanding question of their ‘supervision’ becomes critical.

One outstanding question revolves around the accountability of trusts and whether they should be inspected by Ofsted in much the same way as local authorities. Trusts vary massively in both size and structure, so inspections might be hard to customise, and there remains a tendency within the Department of Education to think solely in terms of school inspections.

The still influential 2015 Education Select Committee report on Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) addressed the role and capacity of the then fledgling offices to monitor and support the anticipated growth of academies. Again, the question of accountability arises because the commissioners are civil servants and, therefore, ultimately responsible to ministers, a point reinforced by reference to the Haldane Model (Report of the Machinery of Government Committee, 1918). The often misunderstood and sometimes controversial role of the Headteacher Boards – to advise the RSCs – add to the mystic of the regional offices.

Four themes are worth considering in the quest to providing great education everywhere. Firstly, the value of effective leadership and governance. For leadership, the questions are, largely, around how the system produces, retains or attracts sufficient numbers of school and trust leaders. Being a chief executive of a trust is not identical to the normal job description for a headteacher; hence, why there is so much interest in their training and support. For governance, MATs have considerable latitude in shaping governance and selecting governors. Education Specialists, The Key, stress the importance of effective leadership in allowing teaching and learning to flourish – the best MATs will embed such thinking across their schools.

Second, geography and community matter.

Partly, this is about connectivity or, at least, avoiding situations where a cluster of

Geography and community matter.

schools may work well together but far-flung schools in the same MAT might feel or be isolated. Schools do need to have links with their communities so relationships, usually through having an effective approach to stakeholder relationships, are worth nurturing.

Third, expanding MATs have a choice between horizontal growth – more of the same – or vertical growth where either seek nursery and primary to feed their secondary schools or move in the opposite direction. There is no hard and fast rule about this, but vertical growth does have two potential advantages; one is that pupils and students are likely to have more options to select from as they move beyond primary – a farsighted MAT might, for instance, include a University Technical Collage (UTC) as part of its portfolio. Another potential advantage is where subject leadership can extend from early years to school leavers and, consequently, tracking of performance and curriculum development is both seamless and able to benefit from specialisation.

Finally, great teachers are needed everywhere. MATs can provide promotion opportunities (even without going into management), effective CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and other attractive conditions. Making sure teachers feel trusted and valued is an essential function of school leadership and any school or MAT should be sure this is always the case.

What MATs could Avoid and Learn from Local Authorities

Dr Tim Coulson

It's twenty years since I was a proper teacher and directly wrestled each day with helping children develop, learn and flourish as they grow up. Sometimes I look at the great opportunity of working with lots of schools and the benefit they give to so many thousands of children, whilst at other times I think about the direct impact (I always hoped positive), that I had as a teacher on the 30 children I was with each day.

Over a span of 20 years I have worked for organisations that I have loved or loathed (only one in the latter category). I have had the great pleasure to know and talk regularly with leaders of schools and more recently leaders of MATs. The bit I have learnt is that if you get the right leader of an organisation, those outside the organisation can feel pretty relaxed.

I worked for two highly successful councils that saw very good educational improvements. They had many less levers on the schools which they oversaw than now available to MATs. As a local authority officer, I could:

- Use my influence to the maximum to assist governing bodies make good head teacher appointments, or at least look to stop them making foolish appointments.
- Jump in with two feet when a school was going pear-shaped and exercise the responsibility to get the school back on its feet.
- Offer advice as it was sought or where poorer data suggested that advice should be proffered.

In Camden, I could just about know all the 60 head teachers and when needed give any of them a ring and be pretty sure of an immediate reply. In Essex, I never even got to visit all 550 schools and although I met many of the head teachers, I had to rely much more on written communication to keep in touch and to look to exert influence and direction.

MATs not only have the autonomy and responsibility to lead and oversee schools as they see fit but do so in ways that are hugely variable. Many will carry out (no doubt much more effectively) many of the features of the work I knew as a local authority officer. They also have the opportunity of significantly greater leverage and can decide where there are trust-wide approaches and policies that should be seen consistently in all schools. The principle of tightening-up to get to Good and loosening-up to Outstanding looks as useful in trusts as it has been in improvement of individual schools.

As trusts get larger and introduce more area roles, these provide the opportunity to spread the most effective practice across the trust's schools.

Trusts that grow beyond the direct oversight of an executive head have some similar risks in the way they are perceived. As trusts get larger and introduce more area roles, these provide the opportunity to spread the most effective practice across

the trust's schools. However, the effectiveness of this will be associated with the credibility of those taking on these cross-trust roles. Schools have always been clear about the importance of the particular individual they work with from the local authority, and their opinion of the local authority is often shaped by their opinion of particular individuals.

Where MATs have a much greater opportunity for positive impact is in their governance arrangements. The trust board is both accountable for the outcomes in all its schools and it can drive the way the schools operate. Within the region where I used to work, schools in the London Borough of Newham achieved the best results in Year 1 phonics – this must be linked to the area being the most consistent in its approach to the teaching of phonics and the programme of support for teachers in this area.

MATs have the opportunity to be as effective in many more areas of the curriculum. This can be achieved by being clear about the approaches that are most successful (this is one of the benefits of looking across several schools rather than a governing body knowing just their school) and then providing support across the trust from those with the most effective strategies.

MATs have the opportunity to be as effective in many more areas of the curriculum.

We have a mixed school system of maintained schools and academies where the number of academies continues to grow. We will have this mixed system for some years and it was encouraging in my role as a Regional Schools Commissioner to see such a strong appetite across the local authorities with which we worked to push the boat out further in how we do this. Our top ambition was a good school for every child. It wasn't fair that in 4 of the 15 local authority areas in this region every secondary school, maintained or academy, was judged Good or Outstanding by OFSTED, but that in one area this was the case for only just over half the secondary schools.

Since writing this chapter initially, I have had the good fortune to be appointed as a Chief Executive of a MAT and have the opportunity to carry out what I used to pontificate about. My early experience in the role has shown that all the possibilities I thought might be the case are actually true. Like all jobs, though, it's the quality of implementation that matters. We in our trust are busy setting ambitions for 2023 – time will tell whether we live up to the opportunities that we have been presented, but the conditions and environment to give it a go have never been more propitious.

The Known Knowns of MATs

Karen Wespieser

For a structural system reform, MATs are unusually contentious. Lobby groups have been set up to oppose them, local campaigns berate them and the media regularly picks on issues in individual settings insinuating that they are representative of the whole sector (think Chief Executive pay, or related-party transactions). Whilst evidence in support of this view is primarily anecdotal, the problem is, there is also limited evidence regarding the strengths of the approach. MATs are still so new to the education landscape that their evolution is racing ahead of the evidence. In this essay, I will look at what we know.

Defining MAT success by pupil performance alone is incredibly tricky as the number of academies within a MAT changes regularly. New academies are taken on or academies which aren't making satisfactory improvement are re-brokered. Furthermore, we only have three years of data on performance for the new accountability measures which is insufficient to make a judgment. So what are the other options?

Teacher recruitment and retention

Former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan suggested that MATs would provide a model of flexible staff deployment would “give a clear path to career progression that will keep [teachers and leaders] engaged rather than looking for opportunities elsewhere” (2016). Two years on and the evidence is beginning to bear this out. Recent research (Worth, 2017) shows that the amount of staff movement between schools in the same MAT is more than ten times higher than the amount of movement we would expect between any two schools that are not in the same MAT and are the same geographical distance apart. This suggests that MATs have internal teacher labour markets, distinct from the teacher labour market in the local area outside of the MAT.

Furthermore, when classroom teachers and senior leaders move to a different school in the same MAT they are more likely to move to a school with a more disadvantaged intake than a school with a less disadvantaged intake. This is in contrast to teachers more generally, who are more likely to move to a school with a less disadvantaged intake. This suggests that the strategic approach MAT leaders can take towards workforce management might provide an effective mechanism for deploying staff to schools that struggle more with staff recruitment and retention.

Collaboration

During his time as National School Commissioner, Sir David Carter often spoke of schools being ‘givers’ and ‘receivers’ of support and how MATs are one of the key institutions that can foster this (2016). A DfE survey of 326 MATs and 542 single-academy trusts (SATs) found that academies understand the benefits of collaboration (Cirin, 2017). There are some methodological caveats that need to be inserted here – in particular, you need to bear in mind that the survey asked MATs to respond on behalf of their academies, so the reason, for example, for conversion is not

Virtually all MATs believe their structure has facilitated collaboration.

necessarily a first-hand response (School Zone 2017). Despite that, the results are interesting. They found virtually all MATs (96%) believe their structure has facilitated

collaboration, and most have formal relationships with schools outside their trust. They also found that a vast majority (87%) of SATs support other schools. Of the MATs surveyed, 82% reported that the creation of new opportunities to collaborate contributed to the decision of their schools to become academies and 40% believed this was the main reason for their schools converting.

Financial efficiencies

When MATs are compared to SATs and local authorities (LAs) in terms of financial efficiencies, the evidence shows that LA schools spend slightly more per pupil on running expenses than both SATs and MATs, but MAT schools spend more on teaching staff, supply staff and support staff (Andrews and Townsley, 2017). Surveys show that the majority of MATs, especially those that are larger, can provide examples of efficiencies achieved, with trusts able to articulate areas where they have made significant savings including payroll, catering, and grounds maintenance (Cirin, 2017). However, it needs to be noted that the use of procurement frameworks by MATs is not yet widespread and NFER analysis of SFR data suggests that the larger the trust, the more likely it will be in a deficit position (Easton, 2017).

Conclusion

So, whilst the big picture is promising, I would be remiss as a researcher not to point out that more research is needed. We still need to address the

We still need to address the known unknowns around the best size for a MAT, the best structure, approaches to leadership, organisation and funding.

of us.

known unknowns around the best size for a MAT, the best structure, approaches to leadership, organisation and funding. Once we have the data, we will also have to return to look pupil progress and pupil outcomes because at the end of the day, you can have whatever structure you like but if it doesn't work for the kids, it doesn't work for any

Change, Consistency and Collaboration: Our Journey

The Executive Team of Sharnbrook Academy Federation (SAF)

SAF is on a mission to professionalise and standardise systems across the Trust, ensuring they are in the best position possible to support school improvement, enable collaboration and operate efficiently. What has the process of shifting from being a federated group of schools, to a MAT with all staff working for one employer, been like?

Peter Rose, Director of Education and Learning

For us, a lot of change has been driven by the move from a three-tier to a two-tier system in Bedford. That change created an opportunity from a school improvement point of view, but also highlighted some barriers to overcome. SAF is unusual perhaps in that all the member schools were good or outstanding. While we may have been a successful lower, middle or upper school, we are now operating fully in the primary and secondary sector. Experience in terms of what that looks like for our young people, in our context, is therefore a change we all have to adapt to.

All our schools had their own effective, independent systems. But to create consistency across the Trust, we're building shared systems to support school improvement. For example, we've been standardising the appraisal process, lesson observations, assessment and the CPD offer. We've been clear about needing a Trust approach that works for all of us, with representation from all the schools as to what that system looks like.

Once you start rolling out the systems, other change naturally follows. If there's a standard assessment system, it makes sense to have a standardised assessment calendar. And then standardised assessments. Then you can compare data at the same points in time and get a more accurate judgement as to where you are. If you have an appraisal system that's standardised, you start coordinating what your terms and conditions are for target setting and how you're holding people to account, irrespective of their skill, experience or paygrade. That's obviously the next step.

We've been clear about needing a Trust approach that works for all of us.

It's important to get a sense of equality and parity across the system. For example, you want there to be equal access to the CPD offer across

all the schools. It's about creating that sense of one employer. And then, the children become all of our children: there's a vested interest, even if the children aren't in the phase that you teach. Because they will get to you eventually! As a trust that's geographically close, all the children that start in reception will end up in our sixth form. We have a unique opportunity to make a difference to our children.

It's important to get a sense of equality and parity across the system.

Tracy Bannister, Governance and Operations Director

We've had a complete review of our governance structures. This was in part prompted by the change from a three-tier to two-tier system, along with two further primary schools joining the Trust. We've identified skills gaps, strengths, moved people into roles that best fit their skill set – and then had to fill the people gaps that have been created by those moves. We've worked with Academy Ambassadors and Inspiring Governance to help in that.

The local governing bodies now have a much clearer role and remit which helps them in holding their schools to account. With the finance and back office functions being overseen by the Trust board, the local bodies can concentrate on teaching, learning and outcomes for students. They know that the structures are in place to pick up on other issues, and Trust representatives attend local meetings to answer questions and ensure transparency.

Everybody is on this journey together, and no-one has all the answers.

It's definitely a process – I wouldn't say we're the finished article. But the openness across schools is incredible. Everybody is willing to share (because everybody wants

something in return as well!); everybody is on this journey together, and no-one has all the answers. And nobody has to reinvent the wheel, because we're all trying to achieve the same thing.

Karen Sutton, Chief Financial Officer

I joined the Trust two years ago, and my responsibilities aren't just for finance: I oversee the bulk of the back-office support functions, from ICT through to facilities and HR. Coming in as a new person I had a great opportunity to question and challenge how things were done, making sure that our compliance, accountability and reporting structures are robust.

A lot of effort has gone into delivering all these services in a consistent way across the trust. We are one employer, so everybody should get the same service. In addition, we've worked on fully embedding the Academies Financial Handbook, building our compliance with it and changing working practices across all the schools.

We've also changed the way in which we report our financials, and the responsibilities that we give to budget holders in the schools. Now they're really focusing on the budgets that they can influence, rather than having to worry about the cost of a classroom cleaner. We've implemented a new single finance system across all the schools. That's been a huge project, but it is already starting to show benefits in terms of increased visibility of costs and suppliers.

It also makes it easier to be transparent and consultative. Recently we had a whole day with leaders across the organisation to review the finances. By meeting collaboratively and getting that better understanding of each other's strengths and challenges, there's much more ownership in terms of delivering savings. They've come up with the ideas, so they want to see them through, as opposed to me saying you've got to take out 10%. Having the underlying base data for them to understand was key to driving that.

My advice to others would be to make sure you've got sufficient capacity within yourself and your surrounding teams to be able to deliver the change you want to see, without it impacting on your day to day support and delivery. It's like turning an oil tanker. You've got to work really hard to get that initial movement going. But the sooner you make that change, the sooner you start reaping the benefits of it.

Iain Denning, Chief Executive Officer

We've been a federation since 2011, but it was only when two more schools joined us in 2016 that the realisation dawned that we were a MAT and needed to operate as one. We started to build the central team and the last 18 months has been about professionalisation. For me, that means being compliant, being explicit about what we do in the finances, and being clear in our governance. Peter's school improvement role is vital too, and one that is often missed.

So now we've got the systems in place, and the next challenge is developing people to work within those systems, and building in a consultative, collaborative way. A year ago, the four of us were working in different places, physically. We're now in one office, and that's really powerful. You can have quick conversations, share ideas and achieve so much more, without having to send an email or travel down the road. My other advice to those in a similar situation would be to get someone who can understand finances earlier. Otherwise you can end up in a real mess. And recognise what you have done, the progress you've made. In the education sector we always worry about what we haven't done, and it's a very negative way of looking at things.

In the education sector we always worry about what we haven't done.

We're starting to see the benefits of standardisation in terms of saving time and workload. For example, subject leads working together to choose exam board specifications. With more of that happening, we'll see people really buying into the Trust concept.

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Tracy has worked for SAF since 2010. She first joined the organisation as Extended Schools Coordinator. She is responsible for all aspects of governance, compliance, policies and is the Data Protection Officer for SAF. Tracy fulfils the role of Company Secretary to SAF as well. Previous to this, Tracy worked in the banking sector where she was the Regional Functional Operations Manager for a major international bank.

Professor Neil Carmichael

Neil joined PLMR as a Senior Adviser in 2017. He is the chair of the Pearson Commission on Education for Work, Life and a Changing Economy and the Association of Dental Groups. Prior to this, Neil served seven years in the House of Commons as the Conservative MP for Stroud and chaired the Education Select Committee between 2015 – 2017.

Neil is a Senior Adviser at Wild Search and in 2011, co-authored with Edward Wild the report *Who Governs the Governors?*, which led to the formation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership and he has contributed to subsequent Wild Search reports on education and governance. His early career was in agriculture and education.

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Tim joined the Unity Schools Partnership (formerly the Samuel Ward Trust) as its Chief Executive Officer in 2017. Prior to his current role, Tim was the Regional Schools Commissioner for East of England and North-East London. His early career was teaching in London primary schools, before becoming Headteacher at William Tyndale Primary School. He also led an Education Action Zone in Lambeth and has been responsible for curriculum and assessment developments at the Qualifications and Assessment Authority. He has previously been Director of Education at Essex County Council and National Director of the National Numeracy Strategy.

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Claire-Marie is the Chief Executive of The Evolve Trust and has over 15 years of educational leadership experience. Prior to her current role, Claire-Marie was Head of James Calvert Spence College in Amble, Northumberland. Claire-Marie has advised the DfE and QCDA and published a range of articles and journals on Teaching, Learning and Leadership. She has been recognised by TES Teaching Awards for her outstanding contribution to challenging urban education.

Iain Denning

Iain has been with SAF since 2011 and served as head of Sharnbrook Upper School and Executive Principal. Iain entered the profession in 1989 and has been head teacher at two other schools in Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes. As Chief Executive, Iain leads SAF which includes two secondary and three primary academies. The Trust has recently been through a three tier to two tier change in Bedfordshire and this has affected all of their academies and Iain has led on this change and continues to do so as Chief Executive of the MAT.

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Rachel is Chief Executive of the Inspiration Trust, a MAT made up of 13 schools across Norfolk, which specialises in raising educational standards. Rachel was previously Principal of Victory Academy in Costessey in Norwich, which Ofsted rated 'outstanding' under her leadership. She was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in the 2014 New Year's Honours for services to education. She is the founder of Parents and Teachers for Excellence and Trustee of the Globe Theatre.

Mike Everett

Mike joined Study Group in February 2015 as its Chief Operating Officer, UK and Europe. Prior to Study Group earlier roles included Global Chief Operating Officer at YSC (a business psychology consultancy); Global Head of People and Talent (HR Director) for Ipsos; Chief Operating Officer and Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI in the UK; and Global Head of Customer and Employee Research for TNS. Mike has a degree in Industrial Economics from Warwick University. He started his career as a Management Consultant with Ernst & Young following his time as a researcher at Sussex University.

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Clare has been the Chief Executive of Asset Education, consisting of 13 Suffolk schools, since 2017, having previously been the headteacher of St Helen's Primary School from 2011 – 2017. Clare has over 16 years' experience of senior roles within schools and worked as an Education Advisor and School Improvement Partner for the Suffolk County Council.

Aatif Hassan

Aatif is the Founder and Chairman of Dukes Education. He is also the Chairman of Cavendish Education, a group of five schools for pupils with dyslexia and autism; and Deputy Chairman of Governors of St. James Independent Schools. Aatif is also on the advisory board of EdEx UK and Woxsen School of Business.

Victoria Heath

Victoria is Chief Operating Officer at Bohunt Education Trust (BET). BET currently comprises six schools in the South East with plans to open a free school in Horsham next academic year. Victoria has had multi sector experience as General Manager in an IT Distributor and Global Head of Sales in Ethical Investment research within the Finance sector where she worked with many prestigious global contracts. She transferred to the education sector four years ago and has been in post as Chief Operating Officer for a year. She is a graduate from the LSE.

Libby Nicholas

Libby is the Chief Executive of Astrea Academy Trust (formerly known as Reach4 Academy Trust). She was previously Regional Director of Education for the South & West at the Academies Enterprise Trust. Libby began her career as an English teacher, progressing to roles including Head of Year, Head of Teaching & Learning, Assistant Head, Deputy Head and, finally, Headmistress. She is also a former Deputy Director of Education at the Girls' Day School Trust. Libby is the co-author of *Understanding Leadership* with John West-Burnham and *Building Better Boards: An Opportunity for Education* with Professor Neil Carmichael, Edward Wild and Gerard Kelly.

Peter Rose

Peter has been with SAF since 2000 and has served as Head of Department, AST and Lead for the Pilgrim Learning Trust with some 32 schools being a member across Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. As Director of Education and Learning, Peter's role is to coordinate and lead on standardising and aligning key teaching and learning approaches and processes. This also includes CPD and those entering the profession through the SAF ITT arm of the Trust.

Karen Sutton

Karen joined in 2017 as Chief Financial Officer for SAF, having previously worked for a number of private sector companies serving the public sector. This wealth of experience has proved invaluable in enabling the Trust to centralise and coordinate its core functions in relation to finance, HR, site and IT. She has also led on introducing PS Financials to SAF and this has led to more efficient and transparent ways of working across the Trust.

Karen Wespieser

An experienced leader of education research, Karen joined the Driver Youth Trust in 2018, a charity committed to improving the outcomes of young people who struggle with literacy, as Director of Operations. Prior to this, Karen was the Managing Director of the Centre for Education Economics and Head of Impact at the National Foundation for Education Research.

Edward Wild

Edward Wild led the formation of Wild Search in 2010, following an earlier career in executive search with two well established companies. He has specialised in advising on leadership and non-executive appointments across education, charities and agriculture since 2004 for a broad range of clients. A former teacher and Development Director at Hampton School. He has edited a number of reports and publications on education and related subjects.

About Wild Search

Wild Search is an established, well-connected and innovative executive search and advisory company. Our team provides extensive sector knowledge and brings a formidable and constantly evolving network of contacts to every search.

Formed in 2010, our work has encompassed advising on the appointment of executive and non-executive appointments for a range of organisations, primarily in the education and charity sector.

We have also worked with boards to develop new roles and secured shortlists for them. Our market knowledge, network and the Wild Search community are constantly evolving through a combination of searches, reports and events.

We are firmly committed to providing strong methodology, a rigorous approach, thorough research, imaginative thinking, in addition to clear and candid advice. We combine transparency with a sharp focus on the key requirements for each client for every position.

About Wild Research

Wild Research was formed in 2011 and has since published 23 reports. The majority of the reports focus on education, but others relate to charities, housing and development and the rural economy. In order to further our understanding of our clients' needs and outlook, we seek to evolve and improve our knowledge of the issues they face and challenges that lie ahead.

By contacting and interviewing experts and practitioners in each field, we aim to improve our insight, share best practice and provide new perspectives.

Wild Research welcomes ideas for reports and commissions from clients to highlight new developments and challenges within a business or sector.

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