



Some frequently asked questions

Proposed merger of The Learning For Life Partnership & The Learning Alliance

Academies, the current situation, and the proposed change

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust (“MAT”) is a formal collaboration between two or more academy schools.

Schools in a MAT do not need to be the same type of school. For example, primary schools can be in a MAT with secondary and/or special schools.

The board of trustees of the MAT is ultimately responsible for all of the schools within the trust, and trustees are directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Education. However, trusts may delegate a range of decision-making powers to the Local Governing Bodies of the individual academies.

Why would two multi-academy trusts wish to merge?

Through combination two smaller multi-academy trust can generate greater educational and financial benefit in some of the following ways:

- deliver a better experience for our children
- share best practice and therefore improve outcomes for children and develop staff
- be more financially efficient than smaller trusts (for example by centralising services such as finance, HR, payroll, and procurement) and therefore reduce costs and increase benefits to schools
- focus funds where they are most needed and work collaboratively to meet need more effectively and with greater speed
- have more flexibility in how staff are deployed to benefit schools and to develop staff who wish to progress their careers
- more routine access to funds for school development (e.g. SCA) and therefore help schools to improve further and at faster rates
- establish succession planning programmes and to develop staff and leaders within the new trust

The government is keen to see more schools join MATs and smaller MATs to combine to give sustainability and greater impact, and a range of funding and technical support is made available to MATs to support this aspiration.

Can you provide more information about TLFLP, TLA and how things work at the moment?

The Learning for Life Partnership

Learning for Life is a MAT consisting of 5 schools:

- Leighton Academy
- Wistaston Church Lane Academy
- Shavington Primary School
- Wheelock Primary School
- Daven Primary School

The MAT educates approximately 1,900 pupils.

The MAT provides centralised governance, strategic leadership, School Improvement, Finance, HR and payroll, Estates management, and ICT support to its schools. Each school has a local advisory body, which includes parents and others drawn from the local community.

The Learning Alliance

The Learning Alliance is a MAT consisting of nine schools:

- Black Firs Primary School
- Castle Primary School
- Egerton Primary School
- Congleton High School
- Cheshire Studio School
- Crewe Engineering & Design UTC
- Knutsford Academy
- The Oaks Academy
- Sir William Stanier Community School

The MAT educates approximately 5,000 pupils.

The MAT provides centralised governance, strategic leadership, School Improvement, Finance, HR and payroll, Estates management, and ICT support to its schools. Each school has a local advisory body, which includes parents and others drawn from the local community.

Detailed information about each school's academic performance with links to most recent Ofsted reports can be found via the government's school performance

[*School Performance Tables*](#)



What is the proposed change?

It is proposed that the two trusts combine to form one legal entity. The new MAT would have a single trust board, executive leadership team, and central services team.

The new trust will adopt a single scheme of delegation, which would retain local governing boards/local advisory boards. As now, our successful schools can continue to thrive in their local communities and will retain their own individual ethos within the broader core values expressed by the trust.

This scheme of delegation will reflect existing arrangements. We intend to revise this during the course of the 2022/23 academic year as the new trust establishes itself by involving all local governing bodies.

It is proposed the new trust will be operational from 1 April 2023.

Why is this change being proposed?

Both trusts are currently seeking to grow to achieve maximum impact on pupil learning and to build financial sustainability and by doing so they believe the educational provision of all pupils can be **improved**, for the reasons outlined above (“Why would two multi-academy trusts wish to merger”).

Greater size should increase the ability of all schools to benefit from those factors, including giving greater educational, financial and organisational support and stability.

Why are we doing this at this time?

We are moving ahead now with this work as a number of senior governance and executive leaders are seeking to step down or move into other roles.

Why are Learning for Life and TLA a ‘good fit’?

Both trusts’ share a strong alignment in a set of common core values and common ambitions for the schools they serve.

The trusts are of similar sizes, have similar schemes of delegation and governance structures, are in geographical proximity to one another, particularly in relation to their Crewe schools, and are both financially secure.

Both trusts have also been working collaboratively for over 12 months, sharing school improvement, financial, and operational expertise via a less formal strategic partnership arrangement.



How will the merger process proceed and what work has been completed to date?

The merger process is being managed by a Project Steering Group of Trustees and executive leaders drawn from both trusts, although each trust is completing its own detailed due diligence to allow Trustees to take informed decisions at the appropriate times. The PSG group is working through a complex and agreed project plan, covering all areas including:

- **Vision and values** – to draw together from both trusts a shared vision for the future
- **Due diligence** – to ensure the merger meets the principles and working rationales of both trusts, benefits the children, the schools and the communities both trusts serve, does not expose either existing trust to undue risks, that both trusts are found to be financially, organisationally and educationally robust and reliable as potential merger partners
- **Governance** – to agree a common governance structure, integrating members and trustees whilst safeguarding LGB status and basing its approach on the principles of subsidiarity and additionality.
- **Legal and regulatory** – to ensure the merger, if it is to proceed, has formal DfE approval and is concluded with due regard to all relevant legal requirements
- **Communication and consultation** – to enable all key stakeholders to contribute to planning and development of the potential merger from an early stage, and throughout the process to ensure the new trust meets the needs of learners, schools and the communities we serve.
- **School performance** – to consider how the merged trust will support schools to be able to improve at faster rates than they are presently able to achieve, whilst cherishing the individuality of approaches specifically designed to meet the needs of the communities each school serves
- **Shared services** – to consider how the combined central team will work to enhance the support all schools receive and to deliver greater financial and operational benefits to all more efficiently, whilst ensuring job security for existing staff of both trusts.



Who will lead the new trust?

Part of the work of the Project Steering Group has included the definition of senior executive roles and agreeing appointment into this shadow leadership structure through a rigorous desktop benchmarking and extended interview process.

The key roles identified and the staff who are current expected to occupy these roles are outlined below:

Dan Thomas – CEO

Dan has been CEO of The Learning for Life Partnership since its formation in 2015. Prior to this, Dan has worked as primary school headteacher, trust school improvement lead covering both primary and secondary, and secondary school assistant headteacher.

Mike Cladingbowl – Director of Education

Mike is currently the CEO of The Learning Alliance, but has taken the decision to refocus his attention specifically on the school improvement aspects of his role. Mike brings with him a wealth of experience, derived from over 20 years in senior roles within Ofsted, culminating in his serving as National Director (schools), as well as extended periods of headship in two secondary schools in Knutsford and Crewe.

Jo Young – Director of Primary

Jo has served as Director of Primary within Learning for Life since 2019, having previously been headteacher at a trust school for an extended period. Jo has been working closely with TLA's primaries to build a collaborative network of support, and this work would continue more formally post-merger.

David Twambley – Chief Operating Officer

David is currently COO (inc. CFO) at TLA. A chartered accountant and qualified HR professional, David brings with him considerable experience derived from both commercial and education sectors, and has been with TLA or one of its predecessor trusts since 2018, overseeing two academy transfers and a previous trust merger.

What will this cost?

We expect that all legal and other costs associated with the merger will be funded through the DfE MAT Capacity Fund.

As now, each school will contribute to the cost of central services and the wider work of the trust to benefit its schools. This will remain as typically around 5% of the general allocation grant in the initial stages.



The impact on school staff

Will my role and responsibilities change as a result of the merger?

No. We are not envisaging any changes to school based roles or responsibilities as a result of the merger. Individual schools will remain responsible for setting their own staffing models and determining roles and responsibilities for staff within their schools.

Will my terms and conditions change as a result of the merger?

No, at this stage we do not expect any changes to terms and conditions of school staff as a result of the merger. All staff are protected by TUPE, legislation safeguarding staff terms and conditions in the event of a transfer in the ownership of a company or organisation, such as this.

Will staff be required to work at other schools in the merged trust?

There will be no requirement for any staff to work at other schools within the trust unless they should wish to do so to develop their professional skills for future promotions. Over time the trust may encourage schools to consider potential for shared staffing in order to safeguard jobs and extend the curriculum offering in some trust schools, particularly those in close geographical proximity such as those in Crewe. Moreover, some staff may wish to extend their experience and work across more than one school. Where we can we will actively support this.

An increased number of schools and an expanded trust will also offer more developmental opportunities for aspiring middle and senior leaders to undertake projects or seek progressions within trust schools, rather than needing to look beyond the existing organisation. So we would aim to have greater opportunities for retaining high quality staff within the trust and develop colleagues for the future.

Will the merger result in any redundancies?

No. Neither trust envisages any issues of this kind if the trusts were to merge and are working to safeguard existing staff roles, both centrally and within schools.

A range of cost savings will be achieved through merger - for example when procuring supplies and services or by taking advantage of any opportunities to reduce unnecessary staffing costs as and when they occur. But the overarching rationale behind amalgamation is to extend and enhance opportunities and improve the stability and security of schools within the trust, not to cut costs. The latter will take place naturally over time as the merged trust rationalises contracts, bulk procurement and the like.



The impact on central staff

Will my role and responsibilities change as a result of the merger?

There will be some changes to the roles of central staff and the organisation of central service provision as a result of the merger, and we will be consulting individually with those staff affected by the changes, although as noted above no redundancies are intended, and changes will be limited to essential adjustments to integrate the two existing central teams in place at both trusts.

Once combined the trust will look to amalgamate and harmonise the delivery of central services over time, but we envisage this being a gradual process.

And finally...

What will the new trust be called?

The proposed name of the new trust is **The Learning Partnership**.

This name, drawing from elements of both merging trusts but distinct from both, reflects the overarching ambition to achieve a trust merger of equals to create a stronger merged entity.

How large will the new trust become?

We are proposing to merge in order to consolidate and improve on our existing strengths. Joining together will make us large enough to be sustainable and have greater impact. We have agreed that any future growth can only occur if it does not detract from the quality of education and care provided in existing schools. In the immediate future this would have to add capacity due to the work being undertaken in Crewe. If it becomes apparent that another local school wishes to join our trust then we will both welcome it and consider it carefully. We are not setting any limits on our ambition but we will not grow any further if it unduly risks or limits capacity.