
Academisation

Update:

Growing our Family of Schools



Introduction

In September 2020, Bishop Paul invited all schools in the Diocese of Lancaster to form Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) in order to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education in the Diocese. His reasons for desiring this shift in educational policy in the Diocese were outlined in his letter of 14th September 2020 (Appendix 1), and have been reaffirmed in his most recent letter, included at the front of this document.

In setting out this vision, Bishop Paul was keen to emphasise the desire to protect and preserve the future of Catholic education within Multi Academy Trust families, but also enable greater collaboration and partnership amongst our schools within a shared structure of support and friendship. We recognise that when our schools come together they can better serve the interests of all, each offering their own gifts, and sharing with others their burdens.

However, we also recognise that for our MAT families to grow in a sustainable way, and to be able to meet the diverse needs of all Diocesan schools, a clear plan for growth is essential.

In light of this, the Bishop of Lancaster reaffirms his Vision for Academisation and anticipates that all schools in the Diocese of Lancaster will join their respective Multi Academy families by the close of academic year 2025/2026.

This document sets out how this vision for academisation can be successfully implemented in a way that enables sustainable growth and the development of high quality provision. It collates and builds upon previous documents issued in support of the Bishop's vision for schools, and introduces new insights developed through the early stages of the academisation process.

In addition to this document, the Bishop and Trustees would like to commend to you all associated documentation, which builds upon previous consultation and outlines the mechanisms by which this academisation vision can be realised.



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Part 1: Setting the Vision

Bishop's Letter



18th April 2023

The Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster

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To the Priests and Religious of the Diocese

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The season of Easter is characterised by a significant phrase of Our Lord that we find at the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles: "You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth". This great missionary commandment, to be witnesses to the love and mercy of God to all generations provides the impulse, the heartbeat of the life of the Church. In our Gospel this weekend, we see that impulse at work in the companions who encounter the Risen Lord in the breaking of the bread. Their hearts burned within them as they rushed back to share their news, to bear witness to the Resurrection with joy.

In response to that commandment, our Church established many schools throughout the diocese to serve the mission of making Christ known and loved. Since the middle of the twentieth century, when our schools were nationalised to meet the post-war needs of our nation, we have had a particular way of working with the state through our network of Voluntary-Aided Schools. Over recent years a new way of working in partnership with the state has been offered to the Catholic Church in England through the creation of state-funded independent schools known as academies. These academies work closely with others under the direction of a Multi-Academy Trust which strives to help schools become the best they can be for our young people and communities.

In 2020 I wrote to schools inviting them to come together to form three Multi-Academy Trusts within the Diocese of Lancaster. At that time, I stated that my aim in doing so was to seek to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education through greater collaboration and support between our school communities and parishes. Many schools and parishes responded positively to this invitation and we are now in a position where the three Multi-Academy Trusts have been formed. These Trusts operate under the authority and oversight of the Diocesan Trustees and the Diocese of Lancaster Education Service and exist in order to serve the mission of the Church in education. I am grateful to the 'founding schools', especially to their staff and Foundation Governors, for their loyalty and courage in responding so positively to my request.

I now request that the remaining Voluntary-Aided schools of the diocese begin a process of conversion to become academies within the Multi-Academy Trusts of our Diocese. This will begin in September and last until the end of the academic year 2025-26. At this point, all the schools of the diocese will be academies. The Diocese of Lancaster Education Service will contact governing bodies outlining when their school is expected to become an academy. I ask that staff and Foundation Governors cooperate fully with this strategy for the good of their school and for the good of the mission of the Church in education.

I repeat what I have previously written: "A Catholic school is not just a building; it is a community, and those who form this community and participate in it cultivate this place of human growth. Over the years, our forefathers fought hard to establish and maintain Catholic Education in these lands. It is our turn to ensure that Catholic Education is maintained and enabled to grow and develop for future generations, particularly through greater collaboration between individual school communities." May this initiative enable us to work more closely together, and together may we respond positively to that invitation of Our Lord to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Yours sincerely in Christ

+ Paul Swarbrick

Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster

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Key Principles

In 1965 the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the Church's long-standing engagement with education as a fundamental part of human dignity. In fact, the Church has engaged in teaching since the time of the apostles, for spreading the Good News is an educative task and expresses the love and mercy of God.

This process continues to the present day, as our schools seek to remain fit for mission while operating under the influences of market forces, changing political contexts and a statutory curriculum. Retaining a distinct Catholic character with Christ at the centre of the common purpose of human formation continues to require a clear, shared vision for educational effectiveness.

Catholic schools' primary purpose is to support our families in the education of their children. Schools strive to enable each child to attain personal excellence in their studies and through the formation of their human values and understanding of God's purpose in their life. Crossing the threshold of a Catholic school should be like entering into the nurturing comfort of a loving Christian family, where all experience welcome, feel valued and are challenged to grow. This is the model we similarly expect of our Multi Academy Trusts, that of a loving family sharing each other's joys and success, as well their burdens and challenge, in a relationship of love and respect.

The Catholic ethos of the school is centred on the 'interaction of a school's or college's sacramental life and its advocacy of the Church's Moral Teaching'. The sacramental life of the school nourishes the spiritual well-being of the school family as they continue to follow the example of the earliest days of the Church, 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42).

What makes a Catholic school distinctive is that it aims to bring Gospel virtues into every aspect of education, engaging young people with finding value and purpose in their life through an awareness of the beauty, truth and goodness of the Holy Trinity. For many students and their families, school life is their gateway to an encounter with Christ, the Catholic Church and to experience something of the life of their local parish. The school is often the first place a child hears the name of God, and as such, a school has the potential to evangelise and be fit for the mission of spreading the Good News.

As an instrument of the Catholic Church, Catholic schools are by their nature collaborative and should always seek to work in partnership with other schools in a spirit of solidarity, never in competition, so that children grow into the 'saving leaven' (GE8) of the world. The spirit of solidarity underpins how the Catholic Dioceses of England have creatively worked together with the State to provide education for over seventy years. The Church's proven history in education reaches back much further and predates State provision in England.

Many of the buildings and sites our schools still occupy were paid for by past generations of Catholics as a courageous investment for the future generations of the faithful. Our current task is to honour the deep commitment to Catholic education of previous generations, guided by key principles of collaboration, familial love, compassion, subsidiarity, and Catholic social and moral teaching. In so doing, we can ensure a legacy of Catholic schooling for the twenty-first century and beyond.



Why Academise?

The Diocese of Lancaster is determined that its schools should offer the best education possible for all our children, regardless of geography or context. In response to this objective, an academisation strategy was developed following extensive consultation, including the Academies Working Group of 2011, the Diocesan-wide consultation process of 2018, and the Academy Strategy Consultation Report of 2019. This document acts as an implementation update to the original insights developed during that consultation and discernment phase, incorporating further insights and feedback shared over the early implementation phase of the academisation strategy.

The question of why we should academise our schools, and form Catholic families of schools within Multi Academy Trusts, can often be split into two distinct responses.

The first pertains to the wider mission of the Church in seeking to provide schools to pass on the faith to our children, our grandchildren, and beyond. At this level, the reasons for academisation may appear remote from the realities of frontline leadership, since some of the risks and changing contexts to which academisation is a response may not impact all schools equally, or may not seem immediately relevant at the local level. Nonetheless, those risks and these changing contexts do exist – some of which are outlined below – and it is now an established strategy of every Diocese in England to pursue academisation. We might call this the **preserve and protect** level of response.

The second response can be identified as the more practical of the two, and relates to the ways in which conversion into Catholic Multi Academy Trusts can help the Diocese ensure all its schools – and particularly the most vulnerable – can be part of a family that ensures the highest levels of support and collaboration, in order to deliver the highest possible standards in the provision of education for the children in our care. This layer of response might be of more immediate interest to governors and leaders, since it relates to the experience ‘on the ground’, answering the question of how academisation might affect operational reality within the school gates. We might call this the **nourish and enhance** level of response.

The Diocese of Lancaster, like others, contains authorities with high demands and stretched services, meaning vulnerable schools require a proactive intervention strategy. Current budgetary issues are causing further challenges for schools seeking to provide a broad and balanced education, as well as being able to provide high-quality support and training for staff and meeting the needs of all pupils. In addition, the challenge of recruiting Catholic leaders, and having robust development programmes to ensure we grow our own future leaders, adds a further layer of difficulty. To meet these challenges, schools increasingly need to find ways to operate with streamlined services as well as working with other schools to create the necessary economies of scale, sharing of resource, and sharing of expertise.

As such, we seek to be responsive to these challenges by understanding how, with Christ at the centre of our schools, they can continue to serve the poorest in our society, enable young people to claim the universal right to a good education, and develop excellent Catholic teachers and leaders. It is in this context that the Diocesan strategy for academisation has been formed,



allowing for the establishment of transparent working relationships between Catholic schools in a geographical area, moving beyond informal cooperation into a relationship of dialogue and collaboration, serving the common good in a spirit of solidarity.

In other words, we see the academisation model, with families of schools in Catholic MATs, as a tool to both **preserve and protect**, as well to **nourish and enhance**.

We are already seeing the fruits of these collaborations within our MAT families, with schools receiving the kind of wraparound support, especially in their more vulnerable moments, which many simply could not access prior to entering their MAT family. This gives them the best chance to ensure the quality and sustainability of their provision and includes support around financial management, governance, inspections, health and safety, buildings, safeguarding, quality reviews, training, and collaboration.

All Catholic education within the Diocese belongs to one family, with the Bishop at its head. No school or college exists in isolation, and closer working relationships between local Catholic schools to provide mutual support in strengthening Catholic life and formation, school improvement, recruitment and retention, leadership challenges and governance will increasingly map the way forward.

As we enter the growth phase of our MATs, we are confident that this provision will continue to grow, providing excellent support for our schools and uniting them in a shared sense of Catholic mission and purpose. When our MAT families are working together and fulfilling their potential, the benefits of this increased collaboration and shared leadership include (but are not limited to):

One Family

- **Core values:** Core values are shared and mutually supported, meaning a consistent approach to Catholic ethos and values embedded in all aspects of a MAT's work.
- **Enhanced collaboration:** the ability to bring leaders and governors together as one family, working more directly and more closely with colleagues across a wider area, pooling their expertise and experience for the good of all.
- **Shared challenges:** expertise and capacity can be used to support one another in a more integrated and direct way, fulfilling our mission to support those in need, particularly in moment of difficulty or great challenge.
- **Shared experience:** Governors and leaders can share their mutual experience and wisdom to formulate strategic approaches to common challenges or experiences.
- **Scale opportunities:** MATs have greater capacity to explore solutions to shared challenges, for example for our most vulnerable children, empowering our schools to better support the needs of children in our care. This could include direct access to specialists such as Educational Psychologists, shared SEND reviews, specialist training opportunities, or developing MAT-wide resource provision.



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- **One Church:** MAT families can create strong, more integrated links between schools as well as the parishes/communities they serve, ensuring the Diocesan vision for education is shared amongst all and is seen as the responsibility of all, using the gifts and talents of those in our schools to support the wider Catholic education mission in its great diversity of contexts and challenge.
 - **Supporting the vulnerable:** MATs have an enhanced capacity to support schools in exceptional circumstances (for example financial, recruitment, standards, leadership) as there is greater system capacity to resolve challenges whilst also ensuring the Catholic education and ethos of the school is protected.

Quality of Education

- **Building excellence** – the scale and ability to build on areas of particular excellence, developing specialist hubs and/or teaching schools, or specialist provision units, which can be developed to the benefit of all.
- **Accessing support:** enhanced access to support and improvement services that may not be readily available in local contexts, or which exceed the limits of an individual school's budget capacity. Specialist support can be more readily accessed through the sharing of expertise within the MAT, or the MAT brokering and funding support externally, for example on curriculum, SEND, assessment, Early Years, governance, extra-curricular or middle-leadership, in addition to operational functions such as finance, buildings, policy or HR.
- **Shared oversight:** this enables earlier identification of emerging needs and what intervention may be required, for example on standards, attendance, SEND, pupil wellbeing, or staff wellbeing.
- **Shared accountability:** the sharing of both responsibility and accountability with the MAT means it is in the interests of all to support the standards and raise the profile of each member, giving an important safety net to more vulnerable schools as well as allowing schools currently in a strong situation to provide enhanced support for their colleagues.
- **Supporting standards:** greater opportunities and capacity for quality CPD can lead to increased standards in pedagogy and shared practice across the MAT family can ensure a dialogic, collaborative approach to school improvement.
- **Clear pathways:** the ability to develop shared curriculum approaches which can develop consistency and understanding, especially across the key transition points, ensuring all are involved in developing a learning pathway that provides a distinctively Catholic education from cradle to career.
- **Increased capacity:** MAT support on compliance and non-educative responsibilities can free up school leadership to focus on what is vital – Catholic ethos and mission, quality of learning, school culture and behaviour, relationship with parish and parents, and the wellbeing of our children and staff



Workforce

- **Access to quality CPD:** high quality CPD can be planned and shared across multiple schools, spreading the cost and maximising the opportunities for staff in our schools, including the provision of high-quality training and resources.
- **Career pathways:** opportunities for career development, through peer-to-peer support or MAT-wide roles, giving staff opportunities for progression and development which may not currently exist within the VA school structure.
- **Succession planning:** strategic succession planning will enable greater planned development for future leaders, including for non-Catholic staff who may have more limited opportunities within VA schools.
- **Diversity of experience:** opportunities for teachers and leaders to experience a variety of different school contexts across the MAT, to support professional growth and enhance understanding of a diverse range of educational contexts and challenges.
- **Supporting Catholic leaders:** a strong network of support for new Catholic leaders, developing their understanding of the mission of our schools and the unique roles and responsibilities of being a Catholic leader.
- **Staff support:** shared policies, such as wellbeing policies, will help ensure consistency of support and expectations and frame such approaches explicitly within a Catholic framework of individual dignity and duty of care.
- **Workload:** increased capacity for shared resources and service provision has the potential to positively impact workload demands, especially in schools unable to access such resource or service whilst a standalone school.

Funding and Operations

- **Economies of scale:** greater scale allows more efficient procurement of resource in addition to provision of backroom services, thereby offering more financially efficient options for our schools and helping them to focus their resource on teaching and learning.
- **Smart working:** enhanced expertise in central teams and increased access to specialist expertise can reduce duplication of effort in areas such as policy, financial process and audit, HR, IT, and estate management.
- **Capital funding:** once reaching a certain size, MATs will receive annual School Condition Allocation (SCA) funding, enabling the MAT to develop a strategic approach to investing in the school estate with regards to improving the learning environment and condition improvement.
- **Policy burdens:** MATs will provide many central policies and procedures for core services, enabling Heads and governors to focus on their main school priorities



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- **Compliance:** MATs can support schools with the increased demands around compliance – e.g.,/complaints, freedom of information, financial auditing, HR, health and safety – and will help ensure no school is at risk due to capacity or administrative errors.
 - **Risk reduction** - legal accountability is held (predominately) at Board level, supported by more resilient compliance frameworks and enhanced central expertise, meaning risks are managed centrally and there is reduced pressure at local school level.
 - **Governance:** MATs can secure greater governance support and expertise, both by developing shared plans for oversight across all schools, as well as putting in place development and support for Local Governing Boards where required, for example through pairing with a Director or through employment of a MAT governance professional.
 - **Access to expertise:** MATs can broker access to services which can be difficult to attain at an individual schools level – for example clerking, governor training, behaviour support, SEND services – meaning schools are not as vulnerable to geography or local capacity.



Managing Risk

Whilst we believe that our MAT vision can help our schools flourish and enhance their provision going forward, we also recognise that this comes alongside the added security and management of risk that comes from being a part of the MAT family.

When calculating risk, the Diocese must take into account both local risk, as well as system-wide risks. This means that the academisation strategy is designed to shape a system-level response to some of the challenges being faced both regionally and nationwide, as well as locally. This strategy is designed to give a level of protection, in addition to strengthening and nourishing, at both the local and the Diocesan-wide level.

For this reason, it may be that in particular areas, a problem identified in this document is not experienced by a particular school, leading the leadership and/or governors to potentially conclude that this is not a problem that needs fixing. However, just as privilege is unequally distributed across geography, then so is risk, meaning that a system-wide response will often encompass those who do not experience a specific issue but who will in charity recognise that they remain part of the solution.

Some of the key risks identified include:

Recruitment - where schools have not been able to recruit successfully, particularly for reserved posts, the MAT infrastructure can help fill any short-term needs using personnel already familiar with Catholic education and understanding of the needs and responsibilities of excellent Catholic schooling. The MAT can also identify and develop future leaders for all its schools to avoid recruitment difficulties in the longer term.

Local provision and support - there is great diversity of support and provision amongst the different local authorities that operate within the Diocese, and the level of service our schools can expect to receive can vary dramatically. This can exacerbate existing inequalities and leave some schools more vulnerable to the challenges they face. Coming together as MAT families can help manage this risk by utilising the scale which MATs offer to provide consistency of support across their family of schools.

Finance - some schools find themselves in the difficult position of declining roll and increasing strain on finances. When this is the case, a vulnerability emerges which can lead some to call into question the viability of schools, particularly where there might be a lack of wider support for upholding educational choice and providing opportunities for a Catholic education to our local Catholic populations. The MAT family can help manage this risk by providing a safety net for schools, as well identifying cost cutting measures without endangering access to quality services.

Governance - with the added expectations increasingly placed on governors, it is becoming more and more difficult to attract (and retain) governors for our schools. This can mean governing bodies carry vacancies for a significant period of time and struggle to recruit people with the right skillsets to support them in the leadership of the school. The MAT system will allow a support infrastructure to be put in place for governors, from training to documentation to audits and



reviews, as well as implementing a shared-risk approach on certain key items which the Local Governing Body will no longer be directly responsible for.

Buildings - the priority of the Diocese has always been to ensure all our schools are safe, dry and warm. However, this has meant that some schools have not had the kind of direct investment – including rebuilds – which some local community schools have received. The MAT system will give greater scope for MATs to push for these kinds of projects, helping ensure our schools estate is modernised and fit for purpose.

Risk management - sometimes we do not know what we do not know, and this can leave us vulnerable to emerging risk which we are unable to manage until it has already become a problem. This can be particularly true with buildings, or finance, or inspection, or health and safety. The central MAT structure can mitigate these risks drawing upon wider expertise at short notice, supporting governors and school leaders to ensure they are able to protect their schools and have the capacity to respond quickly to crisis situations.

Early support - on occasion, and for a variety of reasons, schools may go through difficult moments in which standards may decline. Where this is the case, early support is essential. However, the emerging need may not always be immediately recognised, or there is not always the local capacity to address it. The MAT structure can help ameliorate this by having clear systems for identifying emerging needs and providing early support as required.

Capacity – education - the increasing demands placed on schools can be difficult to manage, particularly when there is limited staff capacity in the building, for example in smaller schools. Where this is the case, the added capacity that can be accessed through the MAT structure – for example in staff training, or sharing policy workload, or sharing curriculum development and resource creation, or sharing subject specialists, or identifying future recruits, or sharing leadership capacity – can be a vital lifeline for our schools.

Capacity – operations - despite the hard work and dedication of staff and governors, sometimes there is simply not the capacity or expertise to be on top of all the demands placed on schools. Whilst Headteachers will always try and ensure teaching and learning is as good as it can be, at times other items such as health and safety, estates management, and business administration are beyond the capacity of individual schools to manage well. The MAT system can help share this burden and free school leaders to concentrate on the most important thing, which is ensuring the culture and standards of the school.

Advocacy - at times situations arise where schools may feel aggrieved at the treatment they have received by an external agency, or the lack of service they may have received, or the policy direction undertaken in a local situation. For example, decisions may have been made around place planning which have a profound effect on a school, but which the school as a standalone institution can struggle to challenge. Where this is the case, the MAT structure, working hand in hand with the Diocese, allows greater collective sway, both helping protect the school and ensuring their voice is heard when key decisions are being made at a local level.



Things to Consider

The question of *why* we should academise can often swiftly become the question of *how* we academise. Whilst this is sensible for change management, it brings with it risk that if this question is asked *before* the vision has been reflected upon and understood, the practicalities can be given too great a prominence and small obstacles can become major hurdles to implementing the vision of the Bishop for his schools. For this reason, we encourage reflection on the following:

Big Picture - think about the wider contexts of these changes, what they are in response to, how they can help **protect and preserve** our schools, but also **nourish and enhance**. Consider how these changes could give our education Mission the capacity to meet the challenges which one individual school may not have, but which could not be effectively solved if we remained operating at the level of the individual school. It is important to widen our vision and recognise that our schools do not have a mission – rather, the Mission has schools, and each of them interact as a vital member of that wider Catholic chorus. The MAT structure can help facilitate that Mission in a more resilient and robust way.

Our Family - Schools are complex organisations. Like a jigsaw, they are made of interconnecting parts, structures, systems, relationships and rituals. Headteachers and governors understand what makes their school work and part of joining a MAT family is understanding these strengths and recognising where the school could grow from working with other schools as equal and supportive collaborators, serving the wider mission of the Church beyond the immediate locale. After all, within a family, love expresses itself in shared joy and growth, but also in sharing burdens and suffering – our MAT family enables this to happen in a way that is not always immediately apparent within the status quo.

Adaptation - Catholic education has been in existence for centuries. Part of the reason for its survival is its ability to adapt and change to serve the needs of the people of each time, while remaining faithful to the service of the Kingdom of God. Being ready to become part of a MAT involves a process of recognising the capabilities and skills that are already in place to work together, as well as acknowledging where there are gaps and blockages.



Part 2: Implementing the Vision

Lessons Learned

As with all management projects, there is value in reflecting on outcomes to date and determining what lesson can be learned to improve the process for all stakeholders as the project continues. Some of these lessons relate to our own policies and processes, whilst others relate to the realities of navigating through the academisation process and identifying where there are successes to be celebrated, but also where there are aspects to be improved upon.

Some of the key lessons we have learned are detailed below. This is not an exhaustive list, but the key experiences that have necessitated us rethinking our approach. This will remain under review and will be modified as required to ensure the best chances of successful implementation.

1. Due diligence

We received feedback that the due diligence process could at times be impersonal and not fully understanding of a school's unique context or situation. This arose because due diligence was often a desktop exercise completed by a third-party professional support team, and not focussed enough on establishing relationships or building on existing local knowledge and connections.

This meant some schools felt the due diligence process was more 'done to' than 'done with' and did not include the kind of dialogue that would really help the MAT understand the school in a comprehensive way, but also help the school enter as equal partners into the MAT with an honest and supportive discussion about what their school's strengths and improvement areas might be.

We also know that at times the key stakeholders in the academisation process – for example the legal team, or the LA/DfE contacts – who come into the project at different points along the timeline, were not always known to the school leadership and governors and again this gave the feeling of being on the outside of the process.

Finally, we were told that at times meetings could proliferate and put a burden on school personnel, especially where it was the same person attending each meeting, where attendance was not strictly necessary, or when meetings lacked clear agenda and objectives.

Response: following this feedback, all our MATs will be directly involved in the project management and due diligence process, with a designated staff member from within the MAT being a continual contact point for the converting school/s. This will enable the process to be personalised and personal, giving schools a chance to be part of the conversation about the current status of the school, celebrating its strengths and speaking openly about its areas for further improvement. This will also allow consistency of communication and ensure schools know who they are meeting, and what for, and how this relates to the academisation process.

In addition, the Diocese has developed project timeline document to help clarify what needs to be done in each phase, so that schools can remain informed at each step of the process.



2. Dialogue and ‘myth busting’

We received feedback that the Diocesan academisation strategy has not been well communicated, or that documents are hard to find. We have also received feedback that there are lots of questions yet to be answered about the strategy and that these have not been engaged with, or there has not been the possibility of engaging with the Diocese regarding these questions. Finally, we have been told that the reasons for converting, and the vision that lies behind it, have not been clearly outlined and so the strategy is difficult to support.

Response: we recognise that, in all organisations, communication is vital. We also recognise that communication is sometimes as much about repetition and regularity as much as it is about access. For this reason, all academisation documentation will be available openly on the Diocesan website, and the link for this webpage will be included in every Diocesan bulletin, in addition to the Clerks’ Briefing notes. Furthermore, we are updating our contact lists to enable us to contact governors directly, where possible, rather than placing the burden for distribution on clerks, Head and/or Chairs, who have enough to do without also having to distribute regular Diocesan updates.

In addition to outlining the vision and the key benefits of academisation within this document, we also recognise it would be beneficial to create a forum for questions and feedback. To this end, we have already arranged an online session for all Heads, Chairs and governors in our maintained schools to ask questions, which will we use to update our Frequently Asked Questions document. This will be an ongoing process and the FAQ document will be distributed regularly, with new updates as they appear, in addition to further supplementary information as it arises. The academisation strategy has also been amended to include further information on MAT governance structures and schemes of delegation (see Appendix 2 and 3).

Finally, we will organise an ongoing round of visits to geographic clusters of Headteachers and governing bodies to outline the Academisation strategy, including a visits schedule to run alongside the proposed conversion timetable contained within this strategy. This will maximise our ability to meet local governing bodies directly, but also to address questions which may be more local or context specific, and which are therefore not always addressed in Diocese-wide documents.

3. Clarity of expectations

We are aware that there is a multitude of understandings around what expectations are for academisation for our schools. These vary, but some of the more common misunderstandings we have come across include the view that academisation is only envisioned for schools who proactively wish to pursue it, to the belief that the academisation strategy will soon be jettisoned by the Diocese and maintained schools will be left as they are, to the idea that governing bodies can simply refuse to engage with the Diocesan strategy, to the idea that all schools will convert into the academy at the same time in 2026.

Response: the re-issuing of the academisation strategy, to include a clearer outline of the Bishop’s vision for his schools, as well as the motivations and arguments which underpin that vision, should help give further clarity for senior leaders and governors in their engagement with the Diocesan academisation strategy.



The Bishop remains clear in his wish that all maintained schools within the Diocese of Lancaster enter their respective MAT families no later than academic year 2025/2026. He is clear that this is the most effective way to address some of the wider challenges facing Catholic education, as well as to bring about further opportunities to enjoy the fruits that enhanced collaboration and support will bring. This has been communicated directly in a letter from the Bishop included at the front of this document, to support the academisation update.

4. Confidence of MATs and wider stakeholders

Having now developed our three MAT families, it has become clear that the development of a central service offer is dependent on the capacity of the MAT to grow in a predictable way. This is vital to give MATs the confidence to build their support offer, to recruit to their service team, and to bid for additional funding which will help facilitate their growth. It is also clear that this level of detail is important for schools yet to join the MAT family, who wish to see what services they will receive upon joining the MAT.

Response: the Diocese has created a conversion plan for schools, informed by a myriad of factors (see point 6 below), including the Appendix 2 feedback given to the Diocese by schools self-assessing when they would be ready to join their MAT family. This is now the MAT growth plan, which CEOs and Directors are requested to implement by the Diocese, giving them the confidence of planned expansion and opening opportunities for additional funding. In addition, the MATs have developed (and continue to develop) their service agreement, outlining clearly what schools will receive upon joining the MAT family and these are available both on MAT websites and as part of the suite of documents which accompany this strategy update. Whilst these will be continually updated as capacity grows, they should help schools understand what the MAT can offer schools when they join the Trust.

5. Optimal cluster sizes

It has become evident that conversion of large numbers of schools all at the same time can create demands which reduce the capacity of the MAT, the Diocese, and the Local Authority to support the conversion process. This can lead to project timelines being missed, causing further problems with conversion. Equally, receiving large chunks of schools all at the same time can reduce opportunities for the MATs to bid for central funding (due to eligibility rules that apply).

Response: we have developed a plan for incremental conversion, with the Wave structure enabling staggered conversion into MAT families over the course of the next three academic years. This will increase the capacity of MATs and other stakeholders to support the conversion process.

6. Assessment of needs

When the academisation strategy was first developed, it was recognised that one of the key responsibilities would be to support vulnerable schools in their improvement journey, particularly those who had received an adverse inspection outcome. This would secure the vision and expectation of the Bishop that our MATs exist to both protect and conserve our schools, but also enable all to flourish. Whilst this will always remain the case, experience has taught that a lack of



diversity within the growth process can place excess demand on MATs, placing strains on their ability to provide the levels of support required of its members. For this reason, MAT growth also needs to include developing capacity and resilience, which means inviting schools with gifts to share alongside those in need of short-term support.

Response: the Diocese has developed a readiness matrix that informs its conversion schedule for schools. This collates various pieces of information, including financial health, governance, standards, staffing, capacity, Ofsted gradings/windows, Section 48 grades, numbers on roll, and any other relevant contextual factors. Whilst this process has certain limitations due to a lack of granular data, it can provide a useful broad-based toolkit for ensuring a balance of needs and gifts when converting schools into the MAT families. This will allow the MATs to grow in a sustainable way, developing their central offer and supporting their family of schools most effectively. We have also worked closely with the DfE and the LA in developing this strategy, and it will be under continuous review in response to any changing local contexts.

7. Geographic Hubs

It was recognised early in the academisation process that the optimal format for conversion of our schools was loosely geographical. This was to enable local clusters of schools to go through the conversion process together, supporting each other on their journey as well as providing immediate local network support within the MAT family. However, at the MAT-creation stage of the academisation plan it was not always possible to prioritise geographic proximity, since those who came forward as founding members did not always fit neat geographic criteria. Our learning from this was that whilst it gave MATs a strong incentive to immediately develop its working practices to encompass and support schools from across all its geographic area, nonetheless at times certain opportunities that might accompany local cluster conversion were not always available, for example shared cluster Q&A sessions, cluster governor meetings, Diocesan and MAT outreach etc. As such, where possible, geographic clusters remain a guiding principle for conversion planning.

Response: in developing the conversion timetables, geographic clusters have been overlaid against the readiness matrix described above. This means that schools will broadly join in their local clusters, though this might not always be exactly the case due to various other considerations that need to take place. This strategy will increase the capacity of the Diocese and the local MAT to engage in consultation and support with clusters of governing bodies and schools, as well making the project management for conversion more efficient. To accompany this, the Diocese has created a schedule of cluster information sessions, to broadly align with the geographic waves on the conversion timetables. The exception to this rule is the Mater Ecclesiae MAT, where there is less geographic dispersal as most schools reside within the city of Preston, but where a more stark geographic disparity exists due to Mater Ecclesiae also encompassing several rural schools outside of Preston. Where this is the case, a bespoke approach will be developed and schools will be supported on a case-by-case basis.



Next Steps for Governing Bodies

To date, timeframes for conversion have been determined by individual schools proactively seeking conversion and becoming founder/new members of their MAT families. This was referred to as the 'coalition of the willing' and included schools who were ready and able to build the MAT structures, from the ground up in the cases of Mater Ecclesiae and Mater Christi.

For the next phase of delivery, a schedule of conversion has been created to build on the work of the initial wave of founder schools. This schedule splits all schools into 'Waves', which correspond with the next three academic years, starting with Wave 2 in 2023/2024. Each school has been assigned a conversion window based where possible on feedback through the 'academy ready' checklist, though also taking into account a number of other key features using the readiness matrix described above, which helps determine the optimum time for a school to join their MAT family. These conversion schedules can be found in the next section of this document.

Once these documents have been received, a recommended actions timeline can be found below:

1. Distribute all academy documents to stakeholders. Take the time to read all documentation carefully. Check that your school has returned all early due diligence documents to the Diocese, including the academy-ready assessment grid and the financial health information request.
2. All schools should organise a governor meeting to discuss the Academisation Plan **no later than 30th June 2023**. This may require an extraordinary meeting, or it may be discussed as part of the regular cycle of governor meetings.
3. Following this meeting, all schools should complete the Statement of Intent form (see Appendix 8) and return to the Diocese **no later than Friday 7th July**.
4. If the governing body agree to move forward with the academisation plan, and indicate this on the Statement of Intent form, they must next confirm a resolution to consult on conversion to academy status. This should take place no later than the end of the term preceding the commencement of the Wave in which your school is due to convert. For Wave 2 schools this will be summer term 2022-23, for Wave 3 schools this will be summer term 2023-24, and for Wave 4 schools this will be summer term 2024-25
5. Once a resolution to consult has been minuted, the Chair should write to the Diocese to formally request permission to consult over conversion to academy status, using the template form provided (see Appendix 9). This should be received by the Diocese no later than the end of the term preceding the commencement of the Wave in which your school is due to convert (see point 4 above). A formal response will be granted by the Board of Education and Formation and a conditional consent letter returned to the school.



-
6. Where a governing body feels there is a significant impediment and they are unable to meet the expected timelines, the Chair of Governors should indicate this on the Statement of Intent form and return to the Diocese no later than Friday 7th July. The Diocese will then contact the Headteacher and Chair to arrange a meeting to explore obstacles faced by the school and/or Governing Body. It is assumed that all governing bodies will want to work with the Diocese to overcome these obstacles and remain solution-focussed. To facilitate exploration of potential solutions, Chairs will be requested to outline the challenges faced, in writing, prior to any meeting taking place. Once these discussions have taken place and issues hopefully resolved, the process returns to Step 4 above.
 7. Once consent is received from the Diocese to consult on academisation, the Chair and Headteacher should arrange a meeting with the CEO of the receiving Trust to discuss timelines and next steps. The Trust will allocate a project management contact who will support your school throughout the next stages of consultation. The MAT will also begin early due diligence in preparation for the conversion process.
 8. The school should start consultation with key stakeholders for a 4-week period. The MAT will provide support for this process, including all template letters, documents, and texts for websites. At the end of the consultation process, the governing body will meet to consider the outcome of the consultation and review the consultation report.
 9. Following review of the consultation report, the governing body should proceed by passing a resolution of the Governing Body to seek permission for conversion to academy status. An appropriate wording for this resolution, to be minuted by the clerk, will be supplied by the Diocese on request. Following this resolution, a formal request to convert to academy status should be made in writing to the Diocese (see Appendix 10).
 10. Once a formal resolution is received, the application for academisation is submitted to the Regional Director, who will consider the application and determine whether to grant the school an academy order. At this point, formal due diligence begins – a detailed timeline of this process can be seen in Appendix 7.

The Education Service will be holding an Academies Meeting for Headteachers and Chairs of Governors, in addition to ongoing bespoke advice as requested, where we can support schools in answering any questions they may have regarding the academisation process. These will be organised roughly according to the geographic clusters in the conversion schedules listed below. The window for these meetings can be viewed at Appendix 5.

Please make a note of this window and of any follow-up dates as they are circulated. We encourage all schools and governing bodies to engage with this process of dialogue, in addition to the FAQs (which will continue to be regularly updated) and we are hopeful this will help address concerns or anxieties regarding the conversion process.



Our MAT families

The Mater Christi MAT

The Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust was formed in September 2021 with an initial 8 founder members, growing to 13 schools by January 2023. The Mater Christi MAT is

geographically dispersed and has great diversity of need, encompassing several very small rural schools, four secondary schools, and areas of high deprivation. This presents operational challenges but also opportunities, including potential for MAT-wide opportunities for leadership, peer support, and sharing of resource.



Next Steps

Now that the Mater Christi MAT is established, the next phase of growth will look to develop capacity and support the growth of the central services offer. The conversion timetable will look at the readiness assessment and combine that with a broad regional approach to conversion, though with some exceptions. For this reason, alongside school feedback and other bespoke contextual knowledge, schools will be scheduled conversion for conversion according to the following broad assumption:

Wave 2: North Cumbria and Carlisle -> West Cumbria

Wave 3: West Cumbria

Wave 4: Lancaster

There may be occasions when particular schools may not follow this broader pattern and may enter the MAT either earlier or later than the rest of their geographic cluster. This might be for a variety of reasons, including a particular strength they could offer the MAT family, a vulnerability with which they may benefit from MAT support, or by specific request from a governing body. Where this may be the case, decisions will be made in close dialogue with individual schools and the Mater Christi MAT.

Growth Outline

Wave One: 8 founder members establish MAT. These were joined by 5 further schools to complete the Wave 1 cohort – 13 schools in total.

Wave Two: A further 8 schools to give a MAT size of 21 schools – northern hub complete.

Wave Three: A further 8 schools to give a MAT size of 29 schools – western hub complete.

Wave Four: A further 6 schools to give a MAT size of 35 schools – southern hub complete.



Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, Carnforth	St. Columba's Catholic Primary School, Barrow-in-Furness	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School. Morecambe
Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Barrow-in-Furness	SS Gregory & Patrick Catholic Infant School, Whitehaven	St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Morecambe
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Frizington	St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Cleator Moor	St. Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster
St. Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, Wigton	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Harrington	Our Lady's Catholic College, Lancaster
St. Bridget's Catholic Primary School, Egremont	St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Workington	Cathedral Catholic Primary School, Lancaster
St. John Henry Newman School, Carlisle	St. Begh's Catholic Junior School, Whitehaven	St. James' Catholic Primary School, Millom
St. Bede's Catholic Primary School, Carlisle	St. Benedict's Catholic High School, Whitehaven	
St. Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Penrith	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Kells	
4313 learners	7015 learners	8985 learners

More information on the Mater Christi MAT can be found here: <https://mater-christi.com/>



The Blessed Edward Bamber CMAT

Schools in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast areas will join the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust, an original MAT of three schools which has now grown to eight schools following the conversion of five primary schools in Wave 1. This has allowed the MAT to increase its central service offer as well as provide further specialist support for schools currently outside the MAT family.



Next steps

The BEBCMAT is firmly established and has grown its offer to meet the needs of its current schools and beyond. The next phase of growth will look to develop capacity and support the growth of the central services offer, as well as building the relationships and networks required to benefit from the opportunities MAT expansion brings. This will include growth of internal structures and mechanisms for support and development, as well looking in greater detail at those areas established MATs can explore, such as CPD, assessment, teaching and learning, and curriculum. The MAT will also continue to explore how enhanced economies of scale can help the MAT deliver value for all its schools.

Conversion timetables look at the readiness variables outlined above and combine this with a broad regional approach, though with exceptions. Schools are scheduled to convert according to the following pattern:

Wave 2: Blackpool -> Wyre

Wave 3: Wyre -> Fylde

Wave 4: Fylde

There may be occasions when particular schools may not follow this broader pattern and may enter the MAT either earlier or later than the rest of their geographic cluster. This might be for a variety of reasons, including a particular strength they could offer the MAT family, a vulnerability with which they may benefit from MAT support, or by specific request from a governing body. Where this may be the case, decisions will be made in close dialogue with individual schools and the Blessed Edward Bamber CMAT.

Growth Outline

Wave One: 5 schools joined the original 3 from the BEBCMAT – 8 schools in total.

Wave Two: A further 5 schools to give a MAT size of 13 schools - Blackpool -> Wyre.

Wave Three: A further 5 schools to give a MAT size of 18 schools – Blackpool and Wyre complete.



Wave Four: A further 4 schools to give a MAT size of 22 schools – Fylde complete.

Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
St. William's Catholic Primary School, Pilling	Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Warton	St. Bede's Catholic High School, Lytham
Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Primary School, Blackpool	St. Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, Blackpool	St. Peter's Catholic Primary School, Lytham
Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Blackpool	St. John's Catholic Primary School, Poulton-le-Fylde	St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Wesham
St. John Vianney's Catholic Primary School, Blackpool	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Fleetwood	The Willows Catholic Primary School, Kirkham
Cardinal Allen Catholic High School, Fleetwood	Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School, St Annes	
4294 learners	5208 learners	6551 learners

More information on the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic MAT can be found here: <https://bebcmat.co.uk/>



The Mater Ecclesiae CMAT

The Mater Ecclesiae Multi Academy Trust was formed in December 2022 with an initial 7 founder members. The Mater Ecclesiae MAT will serve the city of Preston and rural Preston. The MAT will comprise 20 primaries, 3 secondaries, and potentially one sixth-form college. The MECMAT family of schools operates in diverse contexts, from small rural schools to large, inner-city schools, and areas of high deprivation to areas of relative affluence.



The immediate priority for the Mater Ecclesiae MAT is to grow its central service offer and to develop its capacity to support schools at all age phases. This means it will continue to offer a home for primary schools across the city of Preston, but also begin to welcome secondary colleagues into the MAT so that it has a balance of age phase expertise and capacity. This will also enable the MAT to begin work on grasping the unique opportunity of a joined-up educational offer from 2-19, cradle-to-career, setting in place the vision and structures to enhance collaboration across the city of Preston and rural Preston.

Next Steps

Now that the Mater Ecclesiae MAT is established, the conversion timetable will be primarily based on the readiness matrix and school preference where possible. There will be a prioritisation for growing the capacity of the MAT across all age phases, meaning one secondary school to enter the MAT in each wave. The added support small/rural schools sometimes need to convert, because of less on-site staff capacity to manage the conversion process, has meant the staggering of entry across the three conversion waves to ensure there is adequate capacity to give enhanced support if required.

Growth Outline

Wave One: 7 founder members establish MAT.

Wave Two: A further 4 schools to give a MAT size of 11 schools in total.

Wave Three: A further 8 schools to give a MAT size of 19 schools in total.

Wave Four: A further 4 schools to give a MAT size of 23 schools in total.



Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
Christ the King Catholic High School, Preston	St. Maria Goretti Catholic Primary School, Preston	St. Francis Catholic Primary School, Goosnargh
St. Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Preston	St. Mary and St. Michael's Catholic Primary School, Garstang	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Claughton-on-Brock
Alston Lane Catholic Primary School, Longridge	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Lea Town	English Martyrs Catholic Primary School, Preston
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Preston	St. Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Preston	Corpus Christi Catholic Sports College, Preston
	St. Mary & St. Andrew's Catholic Primary School, Barton, Newhouse	
	St. Ignatius Catholic Primary School, Preston	
	Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Ingol, Preston	
	Our Lady's Catholic High School, Preston	(Cardinal Newman College, Preston)
2919 learners	5051 learners	6161 learners

More information about the Mater Ecclesiae MAT can be found here: <https://mater-ecclesiae-trust.co.uk/>

Cardinal Newman College

Up until very recently, it was not possible for Diocesan sixth-form colleges to consider academisation due to legal obstacles that prevented conversion. The legal landscape has since changed and conversations are ongoing around the possibilities of Cardinal Newman College entering into academy status. Whilst the Diocese is supportive of the idea of Cardinal Newman College entering into the Mater Ecclesiae MAT, we recognise the ongoing complexities that need to be explored and therefore would anticipate any potential conversion could only happen once the Mater Ecclesiae MAT was fully developed. The Diocese will remain in regular conversation with Cardinal Newman College, as well as other advisers such as the CES and the DfE, and work together to identify opportunities and solutions that work best for all children and young adults in the city of Preston.



Appendix 1 – Bishop’s Letter (2020)



The Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster
The Bishop's Office,
The Pastoral Centre,
Balmoral Road,
Lancaster LA1 3BT
☎ (01524) 596050

14th September 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For nearly two centuries, following the relaxation of laws against Catholics in our nation, our Catholic schools have been the bedrock of our mission to make Jesus Christ known and loved in our communities. They have formed an essential part of our wider contribution to the Common Good of society. The past few months have highlighted particularly just how vital our schools are and how their work and witness reveals the presence of Jesus Christ in our communities. When our Churches were unable to be open, our schools remained proactive in feeding the hungry, providing care and concern for the most vulnerable, and assisting key-workers in their important role during the Covid pandemic. I thank all those who work in our schools for their endeavours throughout this period not only in their task of education but also by the way they have supported the wider communities in which they serve.

Our schools are an integral and vital part of the Diocese of Lancaster's mission, now and going forwards. In a Catholic school, every child is welcomed, valued, and respected, and the person and teachings of Jesus Christ form the foundation of the school's life and activity. The Gospel values of love, truth, justice, forgiveness, which embraces special care for the vulnerable and those in need will be evident. In a Catholic school, our aim is that every child, whether Catholic or not, will be respected, affirmed, supported, and encouraged to reach their full potential, which for us is life in Christ. Education is a potent weapon in combating poverty. Our Catholic schools are places where young people learn how to be of service to the world, not only as workers but as citizens.

Pope Benedict said when he addressed the children of our nation at Twickenham "A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints. Non-Catholics too will feel encouraged to practise virtue and to grow in knowledge and friendship with God alongside their Catholic classmates. Respect and friendship for members of other religious traditions should be among the virtues learned in a Catholic school."

To help our young people to flourish, the Catholic life of a school must go beyond the mere teaching of RE, encompassing the way everyone relates to each other in a spirit enlivened by the Gospel's call to love God and our neighbours. Our Catholic schools are crucial to the life of our Diocese in announcing the Gospel to the world and are able to do this in ways that parishes alone would find difficult.

Lancaster Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustees Registered - Charity Number 234331



A Catholic school is not just a building; it is a community, and those who form this community and participate in it cultivate this place of human growth. Over the years, our forefathers fought hard to establish and maintain Catholic Education in these lands. It is our turn to ensure that Catholic Education is maintained and enabled to grow and develop for future generations particularly through greater collaboration between individual school communities.

To this end, I invite our parishes and schools to build Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts across the Diocese. Through these local families of schools I seek to protect, secure, and develop the Church's mission in education. This critical step forward for Catholic education in our Diocese, seeks to ensure that every school sits within a network of collaboration so that each institution both gives and receives support. The reality is that Catholic schools must collaborate, viewing other Catholic schools as equal partners. Recognising the increased powers of intervention in struggling schools from government agencies, as Bishop, I am aware that we need to place secure structures around vulnerable schools to help them improve and flourish. If we do not act proactively, we become reactive to circumstances rather than guiding and controlling change.

The move to establish a network of Multi-Academy Trusts in the Diocese seeks to ensure that Catholic schools work closely together. Isolation will compromise the Church's mission in education and put at risk the provision of places of education for our families. The academisation process will enable transparent working relationships to be developed between local Catholic schools to assist with school improvement, leadership recruitment, formation, governance, and co-operation to strengthen our Catholic mission. This development moves beyond existing partnerships or federations to enable a new spirit of collaboration where the success of Catholic schools in our Diocese can remain productive and protected.

Initially, I am inviting schools in Cumbria to come together to form a Multi-Academy Trust. I want this to be a coalition of willing and innovative headteachers and governors who see this as an opportunity to benefit our Catholic education, a further our mission going forward. Over time, I would like all schools across the Diocese to move towards the previously published academy strategy but I want this to begin with those who recognise academisation as an opportunity. When the Cumbria Multi-Academy Trust is developed, I will ask the schools in the Preston area to move to academise. On the Fylde coast we will seek to develop and expand the existing Multi-Academy Trust.

With an assurance of my continued prayers and blessing,



+Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster



Appendix 2 - Summary of key delegated governance responsibilities

Members	Directors/Trust Board	Members of Local Governing Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determine constitution and religious character • oversee the Directors • recognise any strategic partnerships • delegate governance and management responsibility to the Directors (formally appointing and removing the Directors where necessary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hold governance accountability • determine strategic vision and overarching strategic plan • provide strategic leadership and governance • provide challenge and support to senior leaders undertaking the recruitment and performance of any chief executive officer • develop and decide strategic and operational policies • facilitate collaboration • co-ordinate and oversee shared services and resources • develop and oversee the implementation of Trust development plan • approve of performance benchmarks • approve overall Trust budget and advise on School budgets • monitor expenditure in accordance with appropriate authorisations • oversee financial governance and risk management • determine the Trust's reserves/contingency policy • ensure appropriate insurance or risk cover is put in place • undertake recruitment of headteachers and facilitate the performance management of senior leaders • develop shared staff training programmes and opportunities for professional development • support the development and building of leadership and governance capacity at School level • approve of site and asset management strategy • oversee any significant capital expenditure and building projects • approve of all funding applications • decision maker for all appeals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decide the School's strategic vision and uphold the School's distinctiveness and unique character, in harmony with the Trust's strategic vision and ethos • support senior leadership team generally and with specific emphasis on target setting, pupil monitoring and analysing progress data to inform curriculum & budgeting priorities • approve of School development/action plan • approve of School budget and support the head teacher in submitting the budget to the Trust Board for formal approval • approve any significant capital expenditure • oversee expenditure ensuring the School works within its budget and implements the Trust's risk and financial management policies ensuring probity, prudence and efficiency • play an active part in the recruitment of the headteacher • support the senior leadership team in the development and review of an appropriate staffing structure • support the headteacher in the recruitment and performance management of personnel • responsible for staff welfare and well-being, supporting the senior leadership team in monitoring absence and sickness • promote collaboration with other schools in the Trust • develop and review delegated school policies (e.g. admissions, pupil behaviour, safeguarding) • provide advice and feedback to the Trustees, ensuring the School is meeting the needs of its community • undertake all and any appropriate community consultation • provide a point of contact for parents, carers and other members of the local community, maintaining an effective link to the wider community • evaluate its performance ensuring appropriate training and development so that knowledge, skills and behaviour are appropriate for a dynamic education environment



Appendix 3 – MAT Roles and Responsibilities

One of the questions we receive most often is around governance structures within the MAT. This section is designed to help make explain how the MAT operates, what are the key constituent parts, and how they relate to one another with regards to leadership and accountability.

Our three MATs are religious companies limited by guarantee. It is both a company and an exempt charity. The MAT is the legal entity and the employer of staff. It is accountable to the Secretary of State for the funding received and to the Bishop of Lancaster through the Trust Deed. The MATs are diocesan MATs and occupy diocesan land and property under a licence. In this, there is no legal different between MATs and VA schools in relation to ownership of property and land.

The Object of the MATs

The principal Object of each MAT is ‘the advancement of the Catholic religion in the Diocese by such means as the Diocesan Bishop may think fit and proper by, but without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, the establishing, maintaining, carrying on, managing and developing of Catholic schools in the United Kingdom conducted in accordance with the principles, and subject to the regulations and discipline of the Catholic Church.’

This means that the MATs in the Diocese of Lancaster, by their very constitution, are recognised as existing for the advancement of the Catholic religion, through the provision of Catholic schooling, an object which MATs must demonstrate and be held to account on, in accordance with their Trust deed.

The Role of the Diocese

All MATs within the Diocese of Lancaster are fully part of the Diocese and are controlled through the Members. Each MAT has three Members, and these are Bishop Paul Swarbrick, Father Michael Docherty, and Canon Peter Hart.

The Members take an active role in ensuring the charitable Object is fulfilled. To fulfil this responsibility, the Members determine the governance structure of the MAT, determine and amend the Articles of the MAT as required, appoint and remove Directors, and provide ongoing challenge through to ensure the charitable Object of the MAT is being fulfilled.

The Education Service

The Diocesan Schools Commissioner (DSC) and the wider education service continues to represent the Bishop in the oversight of Appointments, Governance, Formation, Catholic Life and Worship, Inspection, Property and in all other areas where the Bishop has an interest. The DSC will also provide advice, support, guidance and receive feedback to and from MAT Boards, the CEOs and the Headteachers. The DSC will also support Members by regularly sharing information and advising on questions as they arise, in addition to the supporting the Annual General Meeting (AGM) process.

Historically, the Diocesan Protocols have set out the relationship between the Diocese and its schools. This is informed by numerous documents, including the *Bishops’ Memorandum of*



Understanding and the *Ways of Working* document. These Protocols continue to apply to MAT structures and ensure that Directors and Governors observe any directions issued by the Bishop and to follow any advice and guidance issued by the Diocesan Education Department on behalf of the Bishop.

Directors

The trustees of any MAT are called Directors, in order to distinguish them from the Trustees of the Diocese. MAT Director Boards must have a majority of Foundation Directors, where the number of Foundation Directors outnumbers non-Foundation Directors by at least two. MAT Director Boards can appoint non-Foundation Directors, though all appointments must be approved by the Diocese.

Directors have overall accountability for the actions of the MAT and are directly responsible to the Members and the Secretary of State for Education. They are required to develop effective systems and leadership to enable them to assure themselves of the processes, safety and standards within the MAT. They have the power to direct change where required.

Directors are unpaid and often identified for the unique experience and/or skills they can bring to the strategic leadership of the MAT. Recruitment of Directors will be collaborative between Diocese and MATs, with an interview process and skills audit to take place before Director appointments.

Local Governing Body

As part of the commitment to subsidiarity and local leadership and voice, the governance structure of the MATs include Local Governing Bodies (LGBs), which are constituted in a similar manner to current governing boards but have an amended range of responsibilities and expectations around partnership working. LGBs will include the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher, a parent governor, a staff governor, and Foundation Governors. LGBs are a committee of the MAT Board and are accountable to Directors.

Local Governors are an important part of the MAT family, providing a layer of accountability and oversight at a local level. To make clear the nature of the relationship between the MAT and the Local Governing Bodies, the Scheme of Delegation is included alongside this document, setting out where responsibility lies for decision-making in all areas of school life.

As now, all Foundation Governors and Foundation Directors shall:

- be practising Roman Catholic;
- not be an employee of the Trust or related to an employee;
- not be automatically eligible for re-election after the expiry of any term of office.

The Headteacher/Executive Headteacher

The core purpose of the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher is to provide professional leadership and management for a school in order to promote high standards in all areas of the school's operation, and to bear witness to the Catholic faith as the central reference point of their



shared mission and school life.

To ensure this success, the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher must establish high-quality education by directing teaching and learning to realise the potential of all pupils. Headteachers must put in place a culture that promotes excellence, equality and high expectations of all students and ensures that the school lives as a Catholic school following the teachings of the Catholic Church and Canon Law, under the Trust Deed of the Diocese of Lancaster.

The responsibility of the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher within a Multi Academy Trust remains fundamentally the same as those within a maintained school. Whilst it is anticipated that the MAT structure will allow pooled capacity for areas such as finance, health and safety, and property management, nonetheless the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher remains the key driver and leader of standards in school life.

Within a Multi Academy Trust, the MAT is the employer, and the Board of Directors is responsible for appointing Headteachers/Executive Headteachers (in collaboration with the Education Service) with the Local Governing Body playing an active part. The Headteacher/Executive Headteacher is thus accountable to the MAT Board. However, the line management of the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher, in day-to-day terms, will be carried out by the Executive Leader.

Executive Officers

Each MAT will appoint a core team of senior staff to lead and manage the development of the MAT's operations and to ensure that the academies within the family are appropriately supported and challenged to be the best that they can be. The member academies will pay into a central fund to support this central core team, and the central fund will meet additional costs to help all academies benefit from economies of scale.

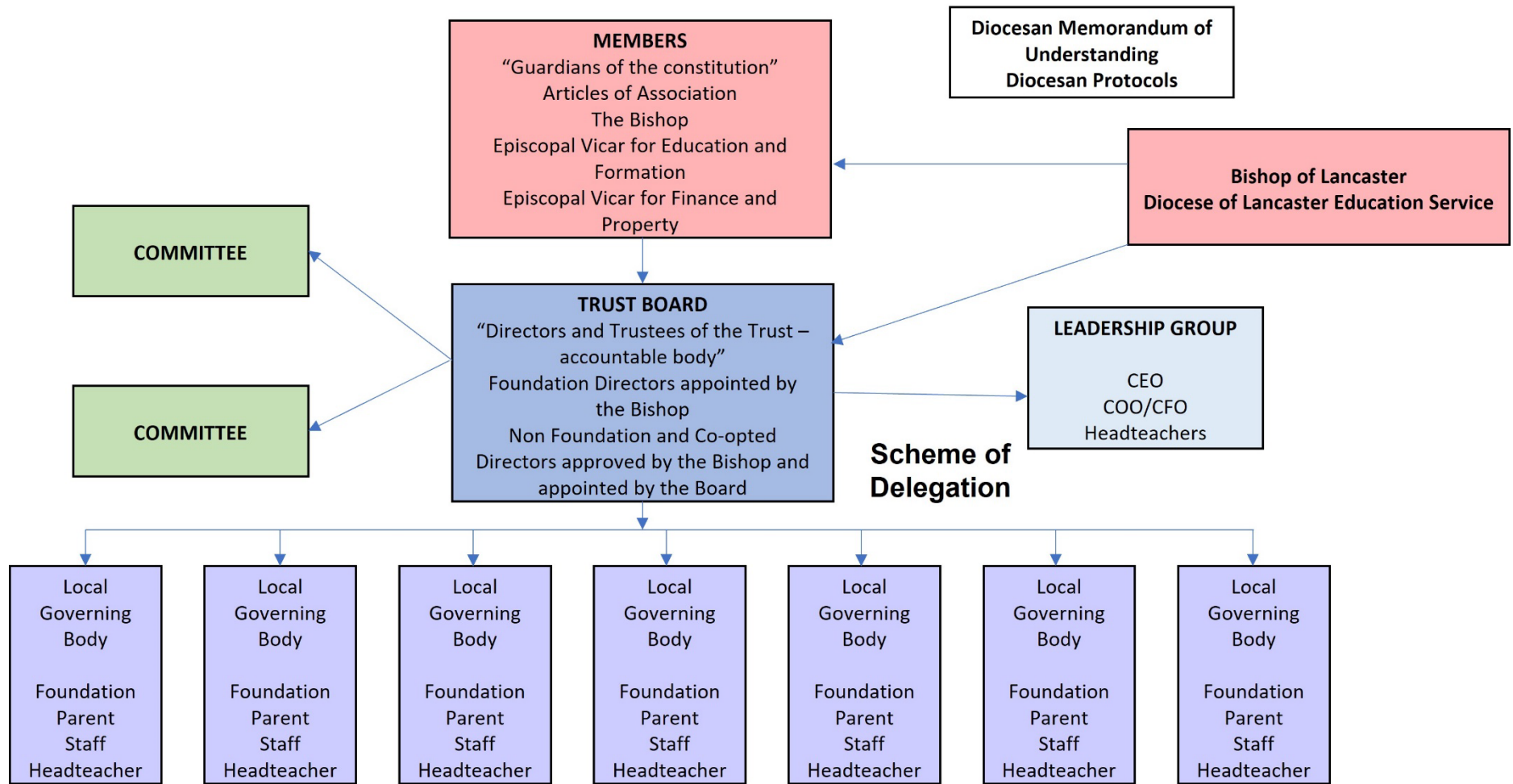
The core team of MAT staff will be recruited and paid according to the ongoing needs of the MAT. In practical terms, this means that the capacity of the MAT and the extent of its service is determined by its growth plan and ability to fund further services. This means that MATs will be able to make more comprehensive support offers once they begin to grow and more schools join the MAT family. In the early years of MAT development these functions might be offered through part-time staff, or shared capacity from those already working within the MAT family of schools.

The Executive Leader (often referred to as the Chief Executive Officer, or CEO) is the most senior employee of the MAT Board and is directly accountable to Directors. This person would be the principal educational and professional adviser to the Board of Directors and is responsible for standards across the MAT.

In addition, MATs must have an Executive Leader who also acts as an accounting officer (often referred to as the COO or the CFO), whose job is to oversee all matters concerning finance for the MAT and the individual academies within it. The CFO/COO would also liaise with the Diocese about buildings as appropriate and would have line management of the finance staff employed by the MAT.



GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



Appendix 4 – Diocesan MAT Growth Overview

	Academies	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	<u>Total</u>
MECMAT	0	7	4	8	4	23
BEBCMAT	3	5	5	5	4	22
MCMAT	8	5	8	8	6	35
<u>Total</u>	11	17	17	21	14	80

Academy dashboard wave 1

MECMAT	7
BEBCMAT	8
MCMAT	13

Total: 28 academies - 35%

Academy dashboard wave 2

MECMAT	11
BEBCMAT	13
MCMAT	21

Total: 45 academies - 56%

Academy dashboard wave 3

MECMAT	19
BEBCMAT	18
MCMAT	29

Total: 66 academies - 83%

Academy dashboard wave 4

MECMAT	23
BEBCMAT	22
MCMAT	35

Total: 80 academies - 100%



Appendix 5 - Diocesan MAT Meetings Schedule

Please find below an outline schedule of Diocesan meetings to accompany the release of the updated academisation strategy. Information on venues and timings will follow in due course.

	MCMAT	BEBCMAT	MECMAT
May 23	Wave 2 schools		
June 23		Wave 2 schools	
July 23			Wave 2 schools
September 23	Wave 3 schools		
October 23		Wave 3 schools	
November 23			Wave 3 schools
January 24	Wave 4 schools		
February 24		Wave 4 schools	
March 24			Wave 4 schools



Appendix 6 – Project Management Timeline – 10 Steps

Step 1: Academy Ready checklist

Step 2: Consultation Process

Step 3: Regional Director - Board application

Step 4: Due Diligence

Step 5: TUPE Process

Step 6: Land and Legal checks

Step 7: Commercial Transfer Agreement

**Step 8: Church Supplemental Agreement (CSA)
and Supplemental Funding Agreement (SFA)**

Step 9: Pre-opening actions

Step 10: Academy conversion achieved



Appendix 7 – Project Management – Detailed

Key Actions		
Phase 1	1.1	Governing body complete Academy Ready Checklist and return to Education Service. Governing Body meet to agree (and minute) to move toward consultation for academisation. Diocese to provide wording for the minutes.
	1.2	Governing Body apply to Diocesan Board of Education and Formation (BEF) requesting consent to consult on converting to academy status – template letter provided (see Appendix 9)
	1.3	Letter of conditional consent received from BEF committee. This letter will form part of the application to the Academies Board in Step 3
	1.4	School identifies key contact for project management (e.g./ Headteacher, Business Manager, Office Manager). MAT identifies project management link to work with the school. Introductions and setting of meeting schedules
Phase 2	2.1	Commence consultation phase (4 weeks) with support from MAT. Letter templates, information documents and wording for websites provided to schools. Consultation meetings to take place.
	2.2	End of consultation period. Consultation report produced. FAQs document updated as required in response to consultation.
	2.3	Governing Body meet to consider the outcome of consultation process. Governing Body submits applications to the Diocese to request conversion to Academy status (see Appendix 10). Diocese to provide wording of governor resolution for the minutes.
Phase 3	3.1	Application submitted to the Regional Department for Education North-West Advisory Board. MAT to claim ringfenced funding to support conversion process. MAT to submit any bids for further funding to support enhanced capacity in order to receive schools
	3.2	North-West Advisory Board considers applications and informs all stakeholders of final outcome.
	3.3	Secretary of State approves proposal to convert to an academy and issues an Academy Order.
	3.4	DfE and LA project managers allocated to the conversion – regular meetings and conversion checklist shared with project manager links in school, MAT and Diocese. Diocese to attend all meetings with DfE and/or LA.
Phase 4	4.1	School and MAT to instruct legal representation – school to use Diocesan nominated legal representatives, Winckworth Sherwood.



	4.2	Commence Due Diligence. Assist MAT in information gathering processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staffing - Finance and budget information - Commercial contracts list - Health and Safety audit - ICT audit - Governance review - Policy review - Standards review
	4.2	Investigate if any GIAS age-range changes that may need to be amended to clarify nursery provision. If age-range changes are required, request for consent letters to be sent to the BEF committee and LA for approval.
Phase 5	5.1	Commence TUPE process (Transfer of Undertakings [Protection of Employment]). TUPE meetings to take place with all staff and union representatives invited. Support from MAT provided.
	5.2	Questions collated and FAQ updated as required. Specific implications to be further explored/advised upon in confidence.
	5.3	Validation letters to sent out to all staff for review, to ensure all current contract details are accurate (e.g. years of service, pay grades etc.)
Phase 6	6.1	Complete necessary legal documentation – supported by nominated legal services.
	6.2	School visits by Diocesan buildings and property teams to check estate and confirm boundaries. Any land issues or complications to be highlighted with legal and resolved.
	6.3	Final versions of the following documents to be sent to DfE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - land questionnaire - site plan - contractual overview for any freehold and/or leasehold arrangements
Phase 7	7.1	Legal services to prepare agreement of the Commercial Transfer Agreement (CTA) and finalise terms of any continuing leases (eg/ 125 year leases from LA).
	7.2	Governing Body meet to confirm CTA agreement, signed by Chair of Governors, Diocese and Local Authority.
Phase 8	8.1	Legal team to complete the Church Supplemental Agreement (CSA) and Supplemental Funding Agreement (SFA)



	8.2	Directors and Trustees to confirm CSA and SFA
	8.3	<p>Copies of the following to be submitted to DfE project lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 paper copies of CSA and SFA - Confirmation that leases and sub-leases have been signed by all parties - Confirmation that CTA has been signed by all parties - Final consent granted from Diocesan trustees - DfE confirmation that all conditions are met - Confirmation of final academisation date
Phase 9	9.1	Attend completion meeting with MAT. Agree next steps for integration into Trust.
	9.2	Review SLA arrangements and issue cessation of service notices as required. Ensure enhanced CRB checks for all staff are in place prior to conversion.
	9.3	Begin migration of school management systems (MIS) and finance systems as required.
	9.4	Begin adoption of MAT statutory policies as required – place on school website.
Phase 10	10.1	<p>Academy conversion completed!</p> <p>School and MAT sign the Conversion Grant Confirmation Statement.</p> <p>School to re-open on 1st of identified month. New URN issued. Update GIAS and school websites as required. Inform necessary services (including exam boards) of changes to URN.</p>



Appendix 8 – Statement of Intent

School headed Paper

Date

Dear Fr Michael Docherty,

STATEMENT OF INTENT – ACADEMY STRATEGY

The Governing Body of wishes to confirm it has received and read the Bishop's recent letter on academisation, the academisation strategy update, the updated academy FAQs, and the MAT-specific documentation for our MAT family.

The Governing Body confirms it has met to consider these documents and recognises that it must now give a statement of intent to the Diocese regarding the conversion schedule for our school contained therein.

Our Statement of Intent is confirmed below:

☐

The Governing Body **will** align with the vision for academisation and work according to the conversion schedule set out in the academy strategy document (April 2023).

☐

The Governing Body **will not** align with the vision for academisation and work according to the conversion schedule set out in the academy strategy document (April 2023) and will engage in dialogue with the Diocese to overcome any obstacles identified, in writing, by the Chair of Governors.

Yours faithfully,

Signed:

.....

(Chair of Governors)

Please return this document to Julie Jones at the Education Service

Julie.jones@lancasterrcdiocese.org.uk



Appendix 9 – Request to Consult on Academisation

School headed Paper

Date

Dear Fr Michael Docherty,

APPLICATION FOR CONDITIONAL CONSENT – ACADEMY CONSULTATION

The Governing Body of wishes to commence a process of consultation and early due diligence regarding conversion to academy status.

The Governing Body wishes to align itself with the Bishop's vision for education as set out in the Diocesan academy strategy, including all timelines for conversion, and recognises that conversion to academy status will be granted on condition of joining the Multi Academy Trust.

The Governing Body understands that, following consultation, any future conversion to academy status will first require the written formal consent of the Diocese, subject to satisfactory due diligence and risk assessment.

We enclose a copy of minutes containing the Governing Body's resolution to consult on conversion to academy status.

Yours faithfully,

Signed:

.....

(Chair of Governors)

.....

(Headteacher)

Please return this document to the Chair of the Board of Education and Formation, Fr Michael Docherty, c/o Julie Jones at the Education Service Julie.jones@lancasterrcdiocese.org.uk



Appendix 10 – Request to Convert to Academy

School headed Paper

Date

Dear Fr Michael Docherty,

APPLICATION FOR TRUSTEES' CONDITIONAL CONSENT – CONVERSION TO ACADEMY STATUS

The Governing Body of wishes to make a formal application to the Trustees for conditional consent to seek conversion to academy status.

The Governing Body understands that:

- any consent granted is conditional only and is not binding until the point of final sign-off by both the school and Trustees.
- any future final consent will be dependent on satisfactory completion of the due diligence process undertaken with the MAT.
- in requesting conditional consent for conversion to academy status, the school confirms it has undertaken appropriate consultation and agrees to undertake any other steps or due diligence exercises required by the Trustees.

We enclose a copy of minutes containing the Governing Body's resolution to convert to academy status.

Yours faithfully,

Chair of Governors

Name

Signature _____

Date _____

Headteacher

Name

Signature _____

Date _____

Please return this document to the Chair of the Board of Education and Formation, Fr Michael Docherty, c/o Julie Jones at the Education Service Julie.jones@lancasterrcdiocese.org.uk

