



Accountants &
business advisers



Academies - Complexities and challenges

Achieving an Academy's vision and ethos while satisfying the requirements of the sponsors, the local community, the predecessor school and the Government is a tall order.

This is where effective partnerships can prove crucial, for every Academy project is unique with its own complexities and challenges.

How do we gain an understanding of these unique requirements and how do we go about helping the Academy achieve the vision?

Across the Academies programme, vision statements are becoming more ambitious. The challenge is to develop detailed and practical implementation plans that deliver sustainable improvements. Working with education advisers, PKF has unrivalled experience in delivering change programmes that improve school performance and support student achievement and development. By exploring the key underlying issues we

greatly increase the likelihood of success.

To understand the vision and its impact on the Academy, it is necessary to ask two questions:

- 1. How radical a change is the sponsor willing to introduce to ensure the Academy delivers world-class education?**

Typically the high-level vision for an Academy contains several innovations that signal radical change and that will improve life chances for local students. We see our initial role as that of 'critical friends', helping the sponsors articulate and quality assure the vision, prove feasibility and engage staff. To achieve this, we have a number of tools to help us guide sponsors through the detailed aspects of vision development. Our tools involve a structured series of questions that helps to highlight all the available

levers for change and the implications of different choices. For example, the focus on skills development may require an innovative approach to assessment for learning for basic skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT), personal and social competences and learning-to-learn skills; many approaches focus on subject knowledge and lack detail, e.g. level descriptors and 'I can' statements.

We have developed detailed frameworks for teaching, learning and assessment that bring rigour to skills development, and we understand what else needs to change to support this approach. We have similar experience in changing the way teaching and learning takes place and the required supporting changes to timetabling, mentoring and other systems.

2. How detailed is the vision and how much practical implementation support is the sponsor offering?

The Academy Trust will be responsible for delivering the vision, with the Principal being accountable for day-to-day management. Our experience has shown that the workload associated with the opening, change management and re-building phases is substantial. We are also conscious of our responsibility to help sponsors achieve their vision, and not just to write it.

Our experience in implementing curricula is backed up by proven implementation plans and training. We can offer you practical advice or be accountable for implementation plans to introduce this approach.

We will highlight and resolve unanticipated issues, e.g, retaining faculty identity and coherence, re-aligning accountabilities and assessment data, changes to the physical spaces and ICT requirements. Addressing these detailed issues in the vision and supporting documents is an important part of winning over staff and students.

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Achieving stakeholder engagement

Academies are national initiatives dependent on sponsor and local support and engagement with the community and its businesses. PKF can meet the needs of interest groups and manage stakeholder working groups effectively, so as to progress the key phases of the work in question as the Academy develops.

We have expertise in managing consultations with the wider community and working groups, for example on curriculum/education, building/design, staffing/HR, finance/governance and consultation/communication.

Particular challenges to the success of the project may emanate from staff and trade unions, local political and other interest groups. The support and engagement of local business, educational institutions and independent sector stakeholders greatly enhances the input of the local community in favour of the Academy, as well as improving prospects for pupils. Ensuring the support of the predecessor school will also be important in ensuring the success of the Academy.

Delivering the new infrastructure

Buildings

The physical practicalities associated with the phased development of the Academy site and the proposed transition to the new build accommodation always poses a challenge. The project will require careful design development based on curriculum planning, decant management, construction site management and ICT planning, as well as stakeholder consultation on all these areas.

ICT

Academies are increasingly opening in the existing buildings of the predecessor school prior to the new Academy building opening. PKF is experienced in the phasing of the ICT implementation so that initial 'quick wins' can be achieved through the implementation of ICT infrastructure to support the teaching and learning. This involves focusing on the components that can be implemented early and transferred to the new buildings without significant cost when they become available.

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