



**Mercia**  
Learning Trust

## Trust Board Terms of Reference

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## DOCUMENT CONTROL

*Unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, this policy will be reviewed every year. Should no substantive changes be required at that point, the policy will move to the next review cycle.*

## 1. Trustees/Board Purpose

- 1.1. The academy trust is the legal entity with the Board having collective accountability and responsibility for our academy trust and assuring itself that there is compliance with regulatory, contractual and statutory requirements.
- 1.2. The board of Mercia Learning Trust (MLT) will at all times:
  - 1.2.1. observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity.
  - 1.2.2. be accountable to its stakeholders and regulatory bodies for its activities.
  - 1.2.3. engage in a partnership with our trust's leadership team.
  - 1.2.4. remain true to the published vision of our trust.
- 1.3. All Trustees are required to:
  - 1.3.1. follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (referred to as "the Nolan Principles" and set out in Annex 1).
  - 1.3.2. comply with:
    - 1.3.2.1. the Articles of association.
    - 1.3.2.2. Master Funding agreements.
    - 1.3.2.3. these terms of reference.
    - 1.3.2.4. our Scheme of Delegation.
    - 1.3.2.5. the Academy Trust Handbook.
    - 1.3.2.6. trust policies and statutory guidance.
    - 1.3.2.7. DFE Academy Trust Governance Guide.
- 1.4. ensure they understand their duties, rights and responsibilities, and that they are familiar with the function and role of our trust.
- 1.5. not misuse information gained in the course of their Trusteeship for personal gain, nor seek to use the opportunity of service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations.
- 1.6. participate actively in the induction process and any relevant training.

## 2. Authority

- 2.1. The trustees are responsible for the governance and supervision of our trust.
- 2.2. Trustees have a number of duties and responsibilities relating to the governance of our trust and its finances. In summary, our Trustees are responsible for:
  - 1.1.1. establishing the vision, mission and values for our trust.
  - 1.1.2. operating our trust in accordance with the objects as set out in the Articles of Association and safeguarding the assets of our trust.
  - 1.1.3. monitoring the strategy and structure for the operation of our trust.
  - 1.1.4. determining the delegation of the running of our trust schools and the direction of the education, pastoral care, financial and other policies of our trust schools to the trust leadership team, reviewing this annually or as required.
  - 1.1.5. ensuring sound management and administration of the entire trust by the trust leadership team and ensuring that the trust leadership team is equipped with the relevant skills and guidance.
  - 1.1.6. financial controls and the financial management of our trust in accordance with the provisions of the Academy Trust Handbook, which sets out in detail provisions for the financial management of Trusts.
  - 1.1.7. setting standards of conduct and values, monitoring performance and the achievement of objectives, and ensuring that plans for improvement are realised.
  - 1.1.8. risk management, that is identifying, quantifying and devising systems to minimise the major risks affecting our trust.

- 1.1.9. ensuring our trust and its schools are conducted in compliance with the general law.
- 1.1.10. holding trust leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff.
- 1.1.11. providing support and challenge to Local Governing Bodies.

### **3. Accountability of Trustees**

#### **3.1. Trustees are accountable to:**

- 1.1.12. the beneficiaries of our trust (pupils, their parents and the local community) for the quality of education and pastoral care, for matters of health and safety and for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the pupils.
- 1.1.13. the Members, DfE, and specifically the Secretary of State under the terms of our Funding Agreement.
- 1.1.14. the Secretary of State (in their role as principal regulator in respect of charity matters) for operating our trust for the public benefit, for the prudent management of our trust and its financial efficiency, and for compliance with legislation including charities legislation.
- 1.1.15. the employees of our trust for their working environment, and for compliance with the contract of employment and employment law requirements, matters of health and safety and data control.
- 1.1.16. other regulatory authorities for compliance with regulated responsibilities to which our trust and its schools are subject.

### **4. Conducting Trustees' business**

#### **4.1. Trustees are required to:**

- 1.1.17. act together and in person and not delegate responsibility of our trust to others (other than under Section 7 below).
  - 1.1.18. act strictly in accordance with the Articles of Association.
  - 1.1.19. act in our trust's interests only and without regard to their own private interests.
  - 1.1.20. manage our trust's affairs prudently.
  - 1.1.21. not take personal benefit from our trust unless expressly authorised by the Articles of Association or the Charity Commission.
  - 1.1.22. take proper professional advice on matters on which they are not themselves competent.
- 4.2. Trustees should also hold our trust leadership team to account. They should offer support, constructive advice, be a sounding board for ideas, a second opinion on proposals and help where needed, but will also challenge, ask questions, seek information and improve proposals where appropriate and at all times act in the best interests of our trust.
- 4.3. Trustees shall have regard to the framework for inspecting schools in England under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and for the inspection of further education and skills providers under section 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (as amended) issued by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).
- 4.4. The duties and responsibilities of trustees are explained in further detail in The DfE Academy Governance Guide.
- 4.5. Trustees shall have regard to the Academy Trust Handbook and Academy Trust Governance Guide, which shall be circulated to all trustees.
- 4.6. The board shall appoint an individual from among their number as chair. A change of chair will require a notification to be made to the DfE within 14 days through Get Information About School (GIAS). In respect of the chair a suitability check including a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) disclosure form must be submitted via the DfE for approval.
- 4.7. The main role of the chair is to chair meetings of our trust board, provide leadership to our trustees and act as the main point of contact between our trustees and our trust leadership team.
- 4.8. Apart from any special responsibilities or powers given to the chair in the Articles of Association (e.g. the right to chair meetings of our trust board and to have a second or casting vote in any case of an equality of votes at a meeting of our trust board), the chair has no special powers or rights over any other trustee. If the chair is to carry

out certain specific functions (for example, the power to approve an overspend in a certain area of the budget) then this must be expressly delegated to them by our board.

## **5. Meetings of Trustees**

- 5.1. There will be a minimum of three meetings of our trustees each academic year. These are supplemented by our sub committees, the standards committee (twice a year), finance, risk and audit committee (three times a year) and HR and People Committee (twice a year). A strategy afternoon will also be scheduled (one per year). Meetings of trustees shall be convened and conducted as provided by the Articles of Association. In determining the agenda for board and committee meetings, trustees will have regard to the requirement on them to:
  - 1.1.1. monitor the educational performance of schools and our trust as a whole.
  - 1.1.2. ensure good financial management and effective internal controls.

### **comply with the Funding Agreement and the current version of the Academy Trust Handbook (or successor documents).**

- 1.1.3. receive and consider information on financial performance at least three times a year; and take appropriate action to ensure ongoing viability against agreed budgets.
- 5.2. The chair shall prepare an annual plan for the meetings of trustees in consultation with the CEO and governance officer. This is to cover the fact that term dates, data publication dates and examination dates may influence the choice schedule.
- 5.3. Our trust governance officer will minute the proceedings and resolutions of the Board and ascertain, at the beginning of each meeting the apologies and whether these are accepted or not, the existence of any conflicts of interest and minute these accordingly.
- 5.4. Minutes of all Board meetings will be sent to all Trustees within seven working days of the meeting.

## **6. Membership**

- 6.1. Our trust board will comprise no more than nine and no fewer than six trustees.
- 6.2. The term of office for trustees will be four years. Subject to remaining eligible, any trustee may be reappointed for a maximum of 2 terms.
- 6.3. Our trust board will appoint member as its chair. Our board will appoint a governance professional to the board.
- 6.4. It is expected that the CEO will attend all board meetings. The board may also ask any other person (usually senior staff) whose attendance they consider necessary or desirable to attend any meeting either regularly or by invitation, to provide information.
- 6.5. **Voting**
  - 1.1.4. The quorum for each meeting shall be at least 3 Board members. Decisions of our Board shall be taken by a simple majority of those present and voting. The Chair will have a casting vote on an equality of votes.

## **7. Delegation of powers of Trustees**

- 7.1. Trusteeship is a personal office of trust and responsibility, and this cannot be transferred to another individual. However, in order to ensure the proper management of our trust, trustees can delegate specific tasks to assist them in carrying out their duties and obligations.
- 7.2. It is for our trust board to determine what decisions it will take for itself, what will be delegated to committees, working groups or individual trustees (e.g. the Chair) and what will be delegated to our trust leadership team. Trustees must also consider when and from whom they should take professional advice.
- 7.3. In determining whether delegation is appropriate, trustees will have regard to the following principles:
  - 1.1.1. Non-executive powers must be exercised by trustees personally and may not be delegated.
  - 1.1.2. Except when it is impracticable to do so, executive powers should be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer who may authorise further delegation.
  - 1.1.3. Every act of delegation is only a delegation of powers and does not relieve trustees of responsibility.
  - 1.1.4. Trustees must not delegate any of their powers listed in Annex 2 ("the Reserved Matters").
- 7.4. Delegation can be made to:

- 1.1.5. board committees (if established).
- 1.1.6. LGBs.
- 1.1.7. any individual Trustee.
- 1.1.8. our trust leadership team (which in turn may delegate to further individuals).

## **8. Stakeholder voices**

- 8.1. Trustees are asked to have regard to the voices of their various stakeholders and to put in place arrangements to receive feedback and to respond appropriately. This shall include the following, as they are involved in other elements/tiers of trust governance and more broadly:

- 1.1.1. Pupils/students.
- 1.1.2. Parents/carers.
- 1.1.3. Staff.
- 1.1.4. Employers.
- 1.1.5. Local Governors.

## **9. Risk management**

- 9.1. The charities statements of recommended practice ("the SORP") set out requirements for reporting on the risks to a charity.
- 9.2. The trustees' report therefore must include a description of the principal risks and uncertainties facing our trust and any subsidiary undertakings, as identified by trustees. The report must also include a summary of trustees' plans and strategies for managing these risks. Trustees must identify specific risks and describe ways to combat each one, rather than making general statements regarding risk management.
- 9.3. Trustees are therefore responsible for identifying the major risks that apply to our trust, including:
- 1.1.1. operational risks (employment issues, health and safety, fraud, service quality and development etc.).
  - 1.1.2. financial risks (accuracy of financial information, cash flow, reserves, over-reliance on funding sources etc.).
  - 1.1.3. external risks (changes in government policy, economic factors, demographic changes, adverse publicity etc.).
  - 1.1.4. regulatory risks (compliance with legislation, changes in policies of the regulators etc.).
  - 1.1.5. making decisions (based where appropriate on advice from professional advisors) as to how to respond to those risks.
  - 1.1.6. making appropriate statements regarding the management of risks in the annual report.
  - 1.1.7. The Finance, Risk and Audit Committee, supported by our trust leadership team, shall prepare a risk register for approval by trustees, along with a procedure by which the risk register shall be subject to regular review. The risk register shall have named individuals assigned to manage each area.

## **10. The management of conflicts of interest**

- 10.1. The Companies Act 2006 imposes a statutory duty on trustees to avoid situations in which they have or could have an interest, which conflicts (or could conflict) with the interests of the Academy Trust. The duty is to:
- 1.1.1. declare the nature and extent of any interest in any matter relating to our trust.
  - 1.1.2. avoid any conflict of interest between that interest and the interests of our trust.
- 10.2. In addition, charity law and guidance issued by the Charity Commission confers obligations on trustees to manage any conflict between a trustee's duty to our trust and their own personal interests or for a trustee to be influenced by conflicting duties to our trust and a third party.

## **11. Recruitment of Trustees**

- 11.1. It is essential that our trust board in conjunction with our members has a mix of skills and experience. Trustees must therefore be able to identify potential new trustees and recommend new trustees to our members in order to plan for succession, which combines continuity of experience and expertise with new ideas and energy.
- 11.2. Our board as a whole is responsible for ensuring that:
- 1.1.1. the skills of any new trustee fit in with our trust's requirements in the short, medium and longer term.
  - 1.1.2. each new trustee is not disqualified from acting as a trustee by any provision of the Academy Trust's Articles of Association (including the requirement that he is not disqualified as a company director or charity trustee).
  - 1.1.3. there is a system in place which ensures that all relevant checks, including an enhanced DBS check (countersigned by the Secretary of State in the case of a new chair), are completed before or as soon as practicable after a trustee takes up position.
  - 1.1.4. the new trustee understands the responsibility they are taking on and consents to act as a trustee.
  - 1.1.5. Each new trustee will be properly inducted to ensure that they understand the nature and extent of the role and responsibilities. It is the duty of a new trustee to ensure that they are familiar with the objects of our trust; its history and ethos and the nature and extent of its activities; and the content of the Academy Trust's Articles of Association.
- 11.3. Trustees shall provide each new trustee with:
- 1.1.6. the Articles of Association.
  - 1.1.7. the Academy Trust Handbook.
  - 1.1.8. these terms of reference.
  - 1.1.9. our Scheme of Delegation.
- 11.4. New trustees shall be required to complete and sign the Trust Application Form. The governance officer shall ensure that any appointment of a new trustee is notified to the DFE (via GIAS) within 14 days of the appointment (as required under the Academy Trust Handbook) and recorded at Companies House.

## **12. Training and development of Trustees**

- 12.1. Trustees shall ensure that our board has the skills and experience needed to perform its functions effectively. Trustees shall also be kept up to date with developments in the legal and regulatory framework in which our trust operates.
- 12.2. The chair (and members) will complete an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of trustees and gaps in their skills will be filled through targeted training.

## **Annex 1 - The Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life ("the Nolan Principles")**

### **1. Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

### **2. Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

### **3. Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

### **4. Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

### **5. Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

### **6. Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

### **7. Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.



## Annex 2      Reserved matters

The reserved matters are to:

### Members

(subject to such other consents/ requirements as might be required by law or the Funding Agreement)

- change the name of our trust
- change the Objects (which would require Charity Commission and Secretary of State consent)
- change the structure of our trust board
- amend the Articles of Association
- pass a resolution to wind up our trust
- appoint the auditors (save to the extent that our trustees may make a casual appointment)

### Trustees

(subject to such other consents/ requirements as might be required by law or the Funding Agreement)

- change the name of our schools
- determine the educational character, mission or ethos of our schools
- adopt or alter the constitution and terms of reference of any committee of our trust board
- terminate a supplemental funding agreement for an individual school
- establish a trading company
- sell, purchase, mortgage or charge any land in which our trust has an interest
- approve the annual estimates of income and expenditure (budgets) and major projects
- appoint investment advisors
- sign off the annual accounts
- appoint or dismiss the Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Finance Officer, the Company Secretary or Governance Professional to Trustees
- do any other act which the Funding Agreement expressly reserves to our trust board or to another body (including for the avoidance of doubt, terminating the Funding Agreement or any part of it)
- do any other act which the Articles expressly reserve to our trust board or to another body
- do any other act which our trust board determine to be a Reserved Matter from time to time.