

GATHERround

EDUCATION NEWS FROM THE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION
THROUGHOUT HULL AND EAST RIDING

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Welcome!

Not only is the weather getting warmer but the political temperature in the world of education is getting very hot indeed! [The Education and Adoption Act](#) and the accompanying White Paper [Educational Excellence Everywhere](#) received Royal Assent on 16th March and there's lots in them of concern to us as governors. They prompted an online petition to government entitled *Scrap plans to force state schools to become academies* which garnered more than 145,000 names meaning that it should have been debated and reported on by Parliament. It wasn't. See why in Section 3 where Vince Barrett looks at the issues around conversion to academy status and offers his view on what needs to be considered here in Hull and East Riding if we are to move towards total academisation.

We once again hosted a very successful annual governors' conference at Bishop Burton College on 19th March with the theme 'Partners in Leadership?' We report on this in Section 1. This event was followed by our seminar On 16th April 'Universal Academisation.' See Section 2 for more on this.

As this edition of GATHERround is mostly about academisation, our 'Ask GATHER' feature is an ideal platform for asking those tricky questions about the process but we can only provide advice if we're asked the questions. Ask them and we'll do our best to help.

E-mail us at: info@ga-ther.org

Post on the Forum at: www.ga-ther.org

Tweet us: [@ga_ther](https://twitter.com/ga_ther)

1. Conference 2016 - what you said

We hosted our 8th Annual Governors' Conference in collaboration with East Riding and Hull Councils on 19th March at Bishop Burton College. We were pleased to welcome 125 governors and from the evaluation forms returned, we can safely say the event was another success. Starting with the venue, it was universally agreed that Bishop Burton is an excellent setting, providing good facilities, helpful staff and lovely lunches.



Happy governors pack the hall

The only slight criticisms were that of the cold temperature in the main hall, the lack of ID badges and the length of the lunch queue. We'll make sure we address these for next year.

The theme for the day was 'Partners in Leadership?' designed to look at the role of governors in the strategic leadership of their schools. The conference programme was well received and this year we had two keynote speakers, starting with Belita Scott HMI who has responsibility for the oversight of inspection of governing boards. Belita's address focused on the changes contained in the new Common Inspection Framework and how these will impact on governance. Of particular note was the emphasis now being placed on safeguarding, described as 'a golden thread' running throughout all judgements, including the testing of leaders' work to meet the Prevent Duty. There is also a brand new judgement: Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare and we as school leaders are expected to demonstrate an involvement in developing and sustaining an ambitious culture and vision for our schools. Belita certainly provided us with a great deal of information about the latest inspection procedures and her presentation gave us much to think about back in our schools.



Belita Scott sets the scene

Belita Scott was rated 97% as 'good' or 'very good'. Delegates found her to be 'engaging', 'factual', 'informative' and 'professional'. An example comment was 'Really useful to hear the human voice of Ofsted, a lot of valuable information.'

We thank Belita for providing us with key inspection information to help us plan for inspection.



David Cameron telling it from the heart

Our second keynote speech was presented by freelance Scottish educationalist David Cameron who, to avoid any confusion, calls himself the Real David Cameron! Right from the start, David launched into making clear the vital role governors should be playing in developing their schools. He talked about governor involvement and one of his principles of successful governance was; ‘People work best when they are enthusiastic about what they are doing - and who they are doing it with and for. Otherwise it makes no real difference.’

David argued that some government policies have discouraged strong governance and he was not afraid to be critical of the direction education in England has recently been forced to follow. Delegates were delighted to hear a speaker ‘telling it like it is’ in an entertaining way and said he was ‘a breath of fresh air’, ‘inspirational’ and ‘outstanding’. 99% rated him ‘good’ or ‘very good’. A copy of both Belita’s and David’s presentations was e-mailed to all conference participants’ schools but if you weren’t able to make the conference and would like a copy, you’ll find them in the ‘Conference and Training News’ section of our website.

As for the workshops, all five of them received a majority of ‘good’ or ‘very good’ ratings from delegates attending. Particularly popular was ‘Governors’ contribution to achieving an outstanding judgement’ presented by Biggin Hill Primary Academy. We thank all our workshop leaders for their hard work in preparing and presenting their sessions.

The presentation of song, drama and Boomwacker band by Hilderthorpe Primary School pupils - all 50 of them - was enjoyed by all and they were described as being ‘Fabulous!’ and ‘Brilliant!’. We thank Hilderthorpe Primary for providing us with such a powerful reminder of why we choose to serve as governors.



Boomwackers in action



Choir in full voice

It was good to see that many people felt they were taking something away from the conference that they could put into action in their schools, such as more focus on governor induction; succession planning; book scrutiny; reviewing the school’s ethos/strengths/weaknesses as GB; more governor presence within school and reviewing performance management of the head and staff.

We certainly get the impression each year that governors value the annual conference and so we are starting to plan the next one. Let us have any ideas you have for a theme, for a keynote speaker, for workshops or if you have a band of willing pupils keen to show us their talents, please let us know via the forum or e-mail.

The keynote presentations were emailed to all participants' schools and they are also available on our website under 'Conference and Training News' together with a breakdown of the conference evaluations.

1. Academic Questions



Emma Knights
NGA Chief Executive

Following the publication of the White Paper '*Educational Excellence Everywhere*' and George Osborne's budget speech, both of which announced that all schools will become academies by 2022 at the latest, we thought it timely to arrange an event to tell governors what this is likely to mean. We were lucky to be able to secure Emma Knights, Chief Executive of the National Governors' Association to come and give us a national overview of academisation and what it means to convert.

The seminar took place at Beverley Longcroft School on Saturday 16th April, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon and was attended by over 120 governors. As fewer than 10% of East Riding schools are currently academies, most of the audience were from the East Riding but Hull, where 60% of schools are academies, was also represented.

Emma had prepared a full Powerpoint presentation but governors had so many burning questions, it soon became clear that it would be better to use the time for a question and answer session. Here are some of the questions that were asked with a brief resumé of the responses:

What is a MAT?

Each MAT is a charitable trust and company limited by guarantee that has responsibility for the running of more than one academy and accountable to the Secretary of State. Each has a set of Articles of Association and these set out the MAT's philosophy which will bring about a common culture for each of its member academies.

*Editor's note. There are three MATs currently operating in the East Riding that are home-grown by local schools. These are: Swanland Education Trust, The Hessle Academy Community Trust, and South Hunsley Education Alliance Trust. Secondary single-academy trusts are Beverley Grammar, Cottingham High and The Snaith School. Goole High Academy is a member of the Wakefield City Academies Trust. Primary academies are Easington and Patrington Primaries, both members of the William Temple Academy Trust based in York and Quay Primary in Bridlington is a member of the David Ross Education Trust, Grantham. Apologies if I've missed any out or got details wrong. Please let me know if I have. The many academies in Hull are run by a similar mix of local and national MATs.

Will my school still be governed in the same way when it converts to an academy?

There will be changes as schools will no longer become free-standing academies and will have to be part of a MAT. How each academy is governed will depend on how much the MAT trustees delegate to their member academies. There are some schools that converted to free-standing academy status some time ago but it is likely that they will expand to become a MAT or join an existing MAT as academisation spreads.

Can we form our own MAT?

Yes you can, providing your school has been judged as 'good' or 'outstanding' but this involves much more than simply working together as a group of friendly schools. There is much to do in forming a MAT such as ensuring due diligence, appointment of trustees and definition of what responsibilities are delegated to each individual academy by the new Trust. All MATs must publish their Articles of Association and Scheme of Delegation. Schools in 'Requires Improvement', 'Inadequate' or 'Special Measures' categories will not have the right to choose which MAT they will join; this will be decided by the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Will we lose our identity?

You shouldn't lose it completely but becoming an academy does mean signing over to the MAT trustees many responsibilities previously carried out by yourselves as governors because each academy becomes a 'branch' of its MAT. However, a good MAT will delegate some duties back to each academy's 'academic council', (sometimes referred to as a 'local governing board' but neither of these should be confused with current governing boards) to fulfil some of the roles and responsibilities which the governing body did in the past. That said, the change of a school's ownership from the LA to the MAT is likely to result in significant changes, for example to the uniform, the timings of the school day, to employment procedures and pay and other school policies in order that all the MAT's academies are operating in the same way. Once a school converts and becomes a MAT member, this is a permanent arrangement and leaving it is almost impossible. Such a decision could only be taken by your Regional School Commissioner and the DfE.

Can a MAT decide to close any of its academies if there is over-capacity?

Yes it can but in a rural area such as the East Riding this is less likely because of the distance between schools.

Are there any advantages to being an academy in a Multi-Academy Trust?

There are many - e.g: broader curriculum; common assessment procedures; joint training and development of staff; more access to specialist teachers; in-house expertise and systems in HR, finance, premises management and data recording.

Naturally, the discussion in the seminar around these answers ranged from hostility to academy status to the realisation that perhaps it is not to be as feared as first thought. Some governors are clearly well down the road of considering how to make academisation work for them while others are very much at the starting point. The loss of support from the local authority is perhaps a key issue for primary schools in particular and is no doubt a significant reason for the low uptake of academisation by primary schools nationally.

If this seminar proved one thing, it is the need for governors to have as much information as possible to help them decide what is best for them. Emma noted that if there is one thing governors should be doing now, it is to learn as much about academies as possible so that all decisions are properly informed. Secondly, governing boards should resist the urge to rush into action. We similarly urge caution at this stage since the political scene changes almost daily as opposition to the notion of 'forced academisation' is being hotly contested on all fronts, regardless of political allegiances. To keep up to date, open forums such as this are clearly a help and we thank Emma for providing the national picture and fielding a wide range of questions. We at GATHER will be looking to run further short discussion sessions in order to address our governors' concerns.

Emma Knights' full presentation can be found in the 'Conference and Training News' section of our website www.ga-ther.org and if your school is an NGA member, you can access their very helpful page which gives you more information:

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/School-structures-and-constitution/Academies-and-free-schools.aspx>

2. Academies - revolution or resolution?

So now we know. The *Education and Adoption Act* is statutory and its accompanying White Paper *Education Excellence Everywhere* says that all schools in England will be removed from Local Authority control by 2022 at the latest. Our seminar above looked at the likely consequences of becoming an academy but I think it helps to look back at how this idea that all schools should be in charge of their own destiny came about. You may recall that Mrs Thatcher was a great advocate of schools having greater independence and in the early 80s came up with the term 'local management of schools' (LMS) which the Education Reform Act of 1988 defined as 'Grant Maintained Status' (GMS). This meant that schools could choose to be removed from Local Authority control with heads and governors being given much greater responsibility for the running of their GM school. Sounds familiar? GMS was certainly the start of what we're seeing happen now but I can't remember many Hull or East Riding schools choosing to go Grant Maintained so Humberside County Council, as it was then, retained control of the vast majority of its 400+ schools. There was a change to local government arrangements when Humberside was abolished in 1996 and the New Labour national administration, elected in 1997, was charged with bringing about yet more reformation in schools following Tony Blair's 'Education, Education, Education' mantra. This they started to do with the 1997 and 1998 Education Acts which dismantled GM status and brought about some fundamental re-structuring of the curriculum, school admissions, discipline procedures and a whole host of other directives.

One change that was to have a significant effect on what's happening now was contained in the *Learning and Skills Act* of 2000 that introduced sponsored City Academies to replace the Conservatives' City Technology Colleges and to re-define as sponsored academies those schools in areas of high deprivation, struggling to cope and often with buildings which were not fit for purpose. There was a huge rebuilding programme, some amalgamations and extensive financial support to rebrand and start afresh - hence the name they were given: Fresh Start Academies.

From 2010, Michael Gove set out to extend this idea to all schools, disadvantaged or not, and went some way towards achieving his dream of absolute academisation before being moved to Justice Secretary in 2014. Since then, Nicky Morgan has relentlessly pursued the dream - hence its inclusion in the 2016 White Paper.

Now I don't have a problem with schools becoming academies if they so wish and we have in our area some very successful and thriving academies. At our March conference, we heard from governors at a Hull primary academy that has achieved an Ofsted 'outstanding' judgement and it was great to hear how much of an influence governors had in helping this to happen. We know of one primary school in the East Riding that was saved from closure by converting to academy status and many others in our area that provide a very high standard of education. What I do have a problem with is schools being forced to convert. More of which in a moment.

As things stand, Hull has 91 schools, of which just over 60% are academies, run by academy chains. In the East Riding there are 143 schools, of which just over 8% are academies. Why the huge difference? It may be something to do with the perception of service they received from their respective LAs but I think it's more to do with the fact that one LA is, by area, amongst the smallest unitary authorities in England while the other is the largest. For academies to work well, they need to work in defined groups, now known as Multi Academy Trusts (MATs). This is much more difficult to do in a largely rural area like the East Riding where your nearest neighbouring school might be some distance away. Many primary schools are very small with fewer than 100 pupils so becoming a stand-alone academy is not an option and finding a MAT to support them is likely to be very difficult. Having said that, the East Riding already has some very successful LA-maintained federations of small schools so why change this?

With all this in mind, I added my name to the petition *Scrap plans to force state schools to become academies* and e-mailed my local MP Sir Greg Knight to tell him I'd done so. Here's what I said:

"This government did not include in its manifesto the compulsory conversion of all schools to academies without consulting parents and other stakeholders. This means the proposal is totally undemocratic and very much at odds with Conservative principles. Only 8% of East Riding schools have converted for a very good reason: we have a lot of very small primary schools who will have difficulty finding a MAT that will support them. I have signed an online petition against forced academisation."

And here's what Sir Greg said in reply:

"Thank you for contacting me about academies."

As you are already aware from the Chancellor's recent Budget statement and the White Paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' set out by the Education Secretary, by the end of 2020, all schools will be academies or in the process of becoming academies, and by the end of 2022, local authorities will no longer maintain schools.

Over the last five years, the academies and free schools programmes have freed thousands of headteachers and leaders to drive improvement in their own schools and across the system. Autonomy and accountability come together in academy trusts, where leaders have more control over budgets and teachers' pay, can take decisions they believe will improve standards and are held to account for the outcomes.

2015 results show that primary sponsored academies open for two years have improved their results, on average, by 10 percentage points since opening, more than double the rate of improvement in local authority maintained schools over the same period. 2015 GCSE results show that secondary converter academies are performing 7.2 percentage points above the national average, with 64.3 per cent of pupils achieving five or more good GCSEs, including English and maths.

A system in which all state-funded schools are academies will deliver better results for all children through empowering great teachers and leaders with better leadership structures. The system will prioritise responsiveness and clear accountability over an arbitrary requirement for all schools in a local area to be run by the same body,

regardless of its effectiveness. There will also be a new role for local authorities, who will move away from maintaining schools and focus on championing pupils and parents.

If, despite what I have said, you have any on-going specific concerns about your local school, please do let me know. Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.”

A standard response which doesn't address the issue of forced academisation and I have no idea what local authorities will be required to do in their new role of 'championing pupils and parents'. What's even worse is the fact that the 145,000+ names on the petition against forced academisation were largely ignored because the Parliamentary Petitions Committee told us:

“The Committee decided not to schedule a debate on this petition because the House of Commons debated the Education White Paper, which includes the Government's policy on academies, on Wednesday 13 April. The subject for the debate was chosen by the Official Opposition (Labour).”

The debate was on an amendment to the White Paper, brought by Lucy Powell, Shadow Secretary of State for Education which called for the requirement for all schools to become academies to be scrapped. You can listen to that debate [here](#) but the outcome was that the Ayes had it and the White Paper will stand.

Following this decision, in addition to hosting the very successful *Universal Acadamisation* seminar as reported in Section 2, we'll be looking in more detail in the future GATHERrounds about the process of conversion to academy status but if you can't wait, go to our forum where you'll find links to many erudite writers' views on the subject.

Finally, what's Nicky Morgan's take on this? At the Easter NUT conference she said:

“There isn't another government just around the corner, to be frank. Teaching unions have a choice - spend the next four years doing battle with us and doing down the profession they represent in the process, or stepping up, seizing the opportunities and promise offered by the White Paper and helping us to shape the future of the education system.”

Here's my take on Morgan's dictatorial comments. There's a growing condemnation of forced academisation amongst the Conservative back benchers led by Graham Brady, Chair of the 1922 Committee, with an eye on the £1.3bn it's predicted to cost. If this unrest grows and there's a cabinet reshuffle following the EU referendum in June, I think Morgan is likely to go. If the vote is to leave the EU, Cameron and Osborne may go as well. The TES reported on 4th April that shadow education secretary Lucy Powell is prepared to form an alliance with Conservative rebels to block total academisation plans. It seems to me that the whole premise is doomed. There'll be more on this! In the meantime, go and have a look at David Marriott's article [12 reasons why academisation will never happen](#).

Last word on the academisation issue for this edition. At Prime Minister's Questions on 16th March, Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion, posed the following question: *“The Prime Minister likes to suggest that he's the champion of localism but today his government is seeking to gag local communities with a crass forced academies policy that stamps out local consultation and dissent. Can he explain to the vast majority of parents and residents in Brighton and Hove who recently roundly rejected academy*

status for two local schools, why it is that their views will count for nothing in the future?”

The Prime Minister replied:

“I would argue that academy schools are true devolution because you end up with the parents, with the governors, with the headteacher having full control of the school, able to make decisions about the future of that school and if that doesn’t convince her then I would say look at the results. If you look at primary sponsored academies, you can see that they have got better records and they’re improving faster. If you look at the academy convertor schools you will see that 88% of them are rated good or outstanding. This is true devolution making sure every headteacher is in charge of their school, providing the great education that we want for our children.”

The very next day *Education Excellence Everywhere* was published. This included removal of statutory parent representation on academies’ governing boards and cancellation of the requirement to consult with parents or anyone else before conversion to academy status. Enough said!

3. And finally...

We’ll end with a bit of relief from academisation with some news about something very positive that’s happening in one of our local academies. Not a lot of people know this but Pauline Quirk of *Birds of a Feather* and *Broadchurch* fame founded the Pauline Quirk Academy (PQA) in 2007 to encourage children and young people to look closely at careers in the dramatic and musical arts. The PQA is based in schools nationally and its target participants are 4-18 year olds. They offer sessions in Comedy & Drama, Musical Theatre and Film & Television, delivered by professional instructors. The latest branch of the PQA is opening as a weekend performing arts centre at Beverley Grammar School and it is offering young people and their parents a free Open Day on Saturday 7th May 2016 from 9.45 am to 1.00 pm. Find out much more [here](#).

We’ll be back in July with more stories to gladden your hearts.