

Guidance on becoming an Accredited School Provider or an Accredited Schools Group in the secondary phase.

Information on the
accreditation system



Foreword from the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Schools working in partnership with each other and with other partners to ensure the best outcomes for their pupils is at the heart of our vision for the 21st century schools system. We know that partnerships extend opportunities for pupils, parents and staff. They can also extend the reach of the best school leaders, enabling them to share their skills and expertise to support school improvement for the benefit of pupils, parents and communities.

Our proposals build on the success of Academy sponsors and lead partners of National Challenge Trusts who are growing groups of schools and spreading excellence, through leading improvement in some of the most challenging schools. We want to encourage this and enable local authorities (LAs) to select organisations from a pool of providers who have been accredited because they have the track record and capacity to drive improvements in this way.

We want to see LAs acting as strategic commissioners using their intervention powers to ensure that schools causing concern are supported to improve. That way we can be assured that every child will make progress and fulfil their potential. Children and their parents deserve no less. So LAs must act when schools are not performing and decide on the best course of action to address this and bring about rapid and sustained improvements. In these circumstances, LAs have significant powers to act, and they also have the tools at their disposal to bring about change. This might be through the LA school improvement services; contracting with a third party, such as another school within the borough or a National Leader of Education, to provide improvement support or deciding the school requires more fundamental change such as becoming an Academy, majority trust or federation. Under this system of accreditation, LAs will now be able to select from the pool of Accredited School Providers (ASPs) and Accredited Schools Groups (ASGs) when looking for a lead sponsor for an Academy or lead partner for a majority trust or federation. This way, LAs and parents can be assured that their schools are getting the very best support possible to help them succeed for their pupils.

We have held a full public consultation on our proposals for ASPs and ASGs and listened to the views of our stakeholders. There was widespread support for the proposals, though some areas have required amendment and further work, and we will continue to work with stakeholders to develop the details of our plans. The report of the consultation details our response and next steps in full.

As part of this, I am launching the accreditation system and inviting proposals from organisations seeking to become accredited. ASGs, in which the lead organisation will be accountable for three or more other schools, will be those organisations who are already involved in significant partnership working, can demonstrate the impact of this and have the capacity to undertake further work of this type. ASPs will either be already leading improvement in one or two schools, or have the capacity and expertise to do so.

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In these more formal partnerships, which are brought about as a result of LA intervention, we know that the lead partner or sponsor must be accountable for the improvement in the school it is supporting and have the track record, capacity, educational expertise and school improvement experience to secure rapid, sustainable improvement.

I am grateful for the responses to the consultation which told us that partners believe the proposals will move us in the right direction. We need to implement the proposals in the right way and that means ensuring that organisations which are accredited have demonstrated their track record and capacity. We will assess this in the accreditation process, ensuring providers have:

- a strong vision for leading improvement in schools;
- strong governance, leadership and management;
- a track record of improving outcomes for children and young people;
- educational expertise and school improvement experience;
- the capacity to achieve transformational change in the schools they are supporting.

I believe this is an exciting development for the school system which will enable our outstanding institutions to drive excellence and improvement across the system.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Balls," with a comma at the end.

Ed Balls,
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families.

1. Introduction: What are Accredited School Providers and Accredited Schools Groups?

- 1.1** We want to ensure that rapid, sustainable improvement is made by schools which are currently underperforming. We have seen that one way this is successfully achieved for some of the most challenging schools is when these schools enter into a formal partnership commissioned by the LA. This can be with another school, college or university, or a private or third sector organisation; and through becoming an Academy or entering into a federation (including National Challenge Federations) or a trust where the lead partner appoints the majority of governors to the school (a majority trust such as a National Challenge Trust). We have learnt that for these formal partnerships to be successful, it is important that the lead sponsor or partner:
- has a track record in their own field;
 - has the vision and capacity to be able to lead a partnership of this kind;
 - is fully accountable for ensuring the improvement through the governance mechanisms used;
 - and has, or is able to access, the knowledge and experience of supporting significant school improvement.
- 1.2** Many of the excellent organisations already leading these partnerships have the capacity and track record to support more schools in this way. We know that there are many other excellent organisations that also have the potential to do this. We want to make it easier for local authorities and schools to be able to select organisations to work with in this way, which are recognised as having the necessary qualities to lead these partnerships. We also want to ensure that the best leaders and organisations are able to have more influence across the system through driving forward improvements, increasing the number of really excellent schools, and growing groups of these.
- 1.3** Organisations who are new to this type of work, or have worked with one school in this way, can apply to become ASPs, leading improvements in one or two schools, and building up the experience and capacity to become an ASG if they wish. Those organisations already leading improvement in two or more schools and wishing to grow further can apply to become ASGs.

- 1.4** The expectation is that a partnership led by an accredited provider will be a long-term commitment. We know it takes time to bring about improvement in schools which have been underperforming for some time. We therefore expect these partnerships to last for at least five to ten years, with the great majority being permanent partnerships. This system is not aimed solely at supporting schools to come out of special measures and to get above the national challenge floor target – rather it is about the lead partner enabling all the schools in a group to reach the same level of excellence and to continue to develop. We expect that in time pupils attending one school in a group will have the same quality of experience and outcomes as those attending the other schools in the group. This is already the aim in some growing groups of schools, e.g. in the Outwood Grange family of schools and in the Harris federation.

2. Who does accreditation apply to?

How will accredited providers lead improvement in schools?

- 2.1** Organisations should seek accreditation who wish to lead the following formal school improvement partnerships, commissioned by the local authority as a result of their intervention:
- Majority Trusts (including National Challenge Trusts) – where the school is established as a trust school with a lead partner and other partners working to ensure sustainable school improvement. A Majority Trust school is a Local Authority-maintained foundation school that is supported by a charity, referred to as a trust, that appoints the majority of governors;
 - Federations (including National Challenge Federations) – where one local authority maintained school acting as a lead partner federates with another local authority maintained school to support its improvement. A federation is where two or more maintained schools are governed collectively under a single governing body.
 - Academies – all-ability, state-funded schools established by sponsors and run as charitable trusts, drawing on the expertise, experience and vision of sponsors with a track record of success. Organisations should be accredited to sponsor Academies which are replacing under performing schools, and those which are being established as new provision in an authority.

Please note that DCSF only expects lead partners of Majority Trusts and Federations to be accredited where the Majority Trust or Federation is being established as a result of a formal school improvement intervention.

- 2.2** Accreditation does not apply retrospectively to organisations which already sponsor Academies; have established a majority federation with another school or are the lead partner in a majority trust.

Who will Accredited School Providers and Accredited Schools Groups be?

- 2.3** Accredited School Providers can be non-educational organisations or educational consultancies, charities or other organisations without direct experience of being accountable for governance of a school, college or university and who wish to become a lead sponsor of an Academy or lead partner of a majority trust or federation. They may also be educational organisations that have experience of working in partnership with schools and now wish to lead a more formal long-term partnership, educational institutions and other organisations which wish to lead one or two schools through Academy sponsorship or

establishing a majority trust or federation, or a combination of these. They may already be supporting one school in this way and wish to take on another one, or they may want to start their first formal partnership. All lead sponsors of Academies and lead partners of Majority Trusts (including National Challenge Trusts) and federations must seek and obtain accreditation as Accredited School Providers before they can be selected for a project. Where a lead sponsor is not an educational organisation, it will need to set out what its educational strategy is and how it will access the necessary educational expertise and school improvement experience.

- 2.4** Accredited Schools Groups will be those providers who wish to lead three or more schools as Academies and/or through majority trusts or federations. Those organisations that already sponsor or are the lead partner of two or more schools will need to be accredited to sponsor further Academies or lead majority trusts or federations. DCSF will provide funding where LAs select accredited providers for majority trusts and federations, where these are set up to support improvement in underperforming schools.
- 2.5** Our plans for accreditation will in part help us to achieve our goal of 400 academies. The new system does not alter the basis for academies – their freedoms or flexibilities will remain as now. Nor does the system involve any change to the status or powers of maintained schools, or the role that LAs play in relation to them, should these schools become part of majority trusts or federations led by ASPs or ASGs.
- 2.6** This system is intended to support local authorities in their role as commissioners, and therefore LAs cannot seek to be accredited to lead interventions in schools as Accredited School Providers or Accredited Schools Groups.

Who is eligible to apply for accreditation?

- 2.7** In order to be accredited, organisations must demonstrate their track record and capacity as detailed in the *Guidance on becoming an Accredited School Provider or an Accredited Schools Group: criteria for accreditation*, which accompanies this guidance document. They must also demonstrate, in the case of educational institutions, that undertaking work as an accredited provider will not be detrimental to their own organisation. In the case of private sector businesses, they should also show that their core business does not make them unsuitable to work with schools, and how they will develop the necessary educational expertise. More information on this is given in the guidance document on the criteria and in the proposal form.
- 2.8** The following organisations may seek accreditation as either an Accredited School Provider or an Accredited Schools Group:
- Maintained schools;
 - Independent schools;
 - FE and sixth-form colleges;
 - Universities;

- Existing Academy and maintained school trusts;
- Private and third sector organisations;
- Educational consultancies, charities and other educational organisations that are not directly accountable for governance in a school, college or university;
- Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses, other faith groups and other organisations that are accountable for governance in secondary schools.

Of the above, those which can apply to be an Accredited School Provider are:

- Non-educational organisations which are not formally partnered with a school.
- Non-educational organisations which have sponsored one Academy or are the lead partner of one school in a trust.
- Educational organisations and institutions which have undertaken significant partnership work but have not yet formally partnered with a school through sponsoring an Academy or leading a majority trust or hard federation.
- Educational organisations and institutions which sponsor one Academy, are the lead partner with one school in a trust, or schools which are federated with another school.
- Educational consultancies and other organisations that are not directly accountable for the governance of a school, college or university; and
- Educational consultancies and other organisations which have sponsored one Academy or been the lead partner of one school in a trust.

Those which can apply to be an Accredited Schools Group are:

- Educational organisations which are directly responsible for the leadership and governance of two or more Academies or schools in majority trusts or federations.

2.9 Please note that non-educational institutions may seek accreditation as part of a consortium in their own right or with an educational co-sponsor. If they seek accreditation in their own right, they should set out what their education strategy is and how they will access the relevant expertise and school improvement experience required to successfully raise standards.

2.10 Proposals from consortia led by non-educational institutions should include the section completed by the non-educational lead organisation under Part Two on track record, and also the relevant section completed by the education co-sponsor. They should also complete Part One on vision and capacity.

2.11 Accredited providers may choose to work with an educational co-sponsor or partner at any point. These co-sponsors and partners do not need to seek accreditation, but we would expect them to meet the criteria on educational track record.

Note on Church of England and Roman Catholic dioceses

- 2.12** Dioceses will need to seek accreditation in order to be considered for new faith provision (that is, additional to the existing Church estate, not replacement new provision for existing Church schools) through (a) Academy projects or (b) majority trust or federations, established as an intervention in response to low standards and for which they require additional DCSF funding to establish.
- 2.13** In cases where a LA, the responsible Diocese and DCSF have serious concerns about an existing CoFE or RC school and decide that they want to establish an Academy or majority trust or federation in its place, Dioceses (in consultation with the National Society or Catholic Education Service, as appropriate) will be given the first opportunity to put together a sponsorship or partner package that protects the faith ethos of the school whilst also addressing the standards concerns. If the Diocese is unable to identify Academy sponsorship or a trust or federation lead partner that meets the accreditation criteria then it would not be possible to proceed with (a) an Academy or (b) a majority trust or federation solution established as an intervention in response to low standards and for which they require additional DCSF funding to establish. In this event, the LA and Diocese together would need to look at other options to improve the school, including forming a partnership with other accredited providers.

Which criteria should organisations demonstrate?

- 2.14** The accompanying guidance document set out the criteria that each type of organisation should demonstrate when seeking accreditation. The table at Annex A shows which type of organisation should demonstrate particular criteria. Please note that it is not a full list.

3. What is the process for becoming accredited?

- 3.1** Organisations that wish to be accredited either as an Accredited School Provider or as an Accredited Schools Group should submit a proposal demonstrating that the organisation has the relevant expertise, track record and capacity to support improvement in underperforming schools, including those in very challenging circumstances, and is able to make the long-term commitment this requires.
- 3.2** DCSF will assess applications for accreditation against the published criteria, and if further information or clarification is needed, follow this up with a phone call or visit to the organisation. Once the assessment and a recommendation has been made, an Advisory Group will review the recommendation. This will then be put to the Secretary of State for a final decision.
- 3.3** If a proposal is unsuccessful, written feedback on the assessment will be given by the assessor, which will be reviewed by the Advisory Group. If the organisation considers the assessment, or result of it, to be unfair, they may submit their concerns in writing to DCSF which will be reviewed by the Advisory Group and responded to.
- 3.4** Application rounds will be held on a termly basis. However, if an organisation which is not accredited wishes to bid for an Academy project, or to lead a majority trust or federation, it may be possible to seek accreditation outside the termly application rounds, through consultation with DCSF.

How do I submit a proposal and where can I find out further information?

- 3.5** Organisations seeking accreditation should demonstrate their evidence against the criteria in a proposal. These do not need to be extensive, and should contain only relevant information requested. A proposal template is available to download from the DCSF website. The criteria for accreditation, and guidance on how this can be demonstrated in the proposal template, is also available to download.
- 3.6** DCSF is available to discuss any aspect of the accreditation process with interested organisations. Please email accreditation.SYSTEM@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk. Completed proposals should also be emailed to this address.

Annex A

All organisations should complete Part 1 of the proposal form to demonstrate their vision and capacity. They should also complete the relevant section of Part 2 Guidance on which section of Part 2 should be completed is given below.

Type or organisation	Criteria to be demonstrated
Non-educational organisations	Criteria for non-educational organisations – 2.1
Non-educational organisations seeking accreditation as a consortium with an education co-sponsor	Non-educational lead should complete the criteria for non-educational organisations – 2.1 Educational co-sponsor should complete the criteria relevant to their sector 2.3 – 8
An educational charity e.g. that undertakes community outreach work and programmes to encourage young people’s engagement in learning, but that is not currently directly accountable for the governance of a school, college or university	Criteria for educational consultancies and charities – 2.2
High performing maintained schools	Criteria for maintained schools – 2.3
Independent schools	Criteria for independent schools – 2.4
FE and Sixth-form colleges	Criteria for FE and Sixth-form colleges – 2.5
Universities	Criteria for Higher Education Institutions – 2.6
Church Dioceses	Criteria for those organisations which are directly accountable for the leadership and governance of a school – 2.7
Existing sponsors of Academies and existing lead partners of majority trusts and federations	Criteria for Academy sponsors and lead partners– 2.8, and the criteria for the sector which is relevant to the lead organisation
CTCs	CTCs should demonstrate evidence against the maintained school criteria
Independent schools which have become Academies	Criteria for independent schools – 2.4
High performing maintained schools which have become Academies	Criteria for maintained schools – 2.3
Maintained schools which are accountable for the governance of other maintained schools through NCTs or otherwise	Criteria for open majority trusts – 2.8, as well as the criteria for maintained schools for the lead school – 2.3



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