





## Introduction

More and more schools are realising the distinct advantages of developing their school-to-school partnerships through the adoption of formal models of collaboration. This guide looks at the **what, why** and **how** of school federation. It highlights the potential benefits of entering into a hard federation, in particular how hard federation can provide a foundation for sustainable, long-term school collaboration.

## What is a hard federation?

Federation is a shared governance structure which provides a basis for extensive school-to-school partnership. Hard federation involves two or more maintained schools coming together with a single governance body<sup>1</sup>. Federated schools remain separate schools, maintaining their own individual budget allocations and reporting results separately. The decision on whether or not to federate is made by the governing bodies of the schools involved. The process for becoming a hard federation is set out in regulations made under sections 24 and 25 of the Education Act 2002<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Note that a statutory soft collaboration is two or more maintained schools with a joint committee of their governing bodies which has powers delegated to make decisions on behalf of all the schools.
  2. The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2007.

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### Why form a hard governance federation?

By entering into a federation, schools agree to work together for the benefit of all pupils and their communities. The shared governance structure of a hard federation allows schools to:

- work together efficiently and sustainably to raise standards, improve services and increase opportunities for pupils and staff; and
- share resources, staff, expertise and facilities.

Rural and small schools, in particular, can benefit from shared governance as they develop joint leadership and shared service models. Schools seeking to work in partnership on particular issues, for example diploma delivery or extended school services, can also benefit from the accountability arrangements federation offers.

### The benefits of forming a hard governance federation

There are many excellent examples of schools raising their standards, increasing pupil numbers, and improving teaching and learning opportunities through partnership and hard federation.

If your school is already part of a soft federation or a loose or informal collaboration and you are considering hard federation, you might want to think about the following benefits of hard federation identified in research from the National College of School Leadership (NCSL):



- **Developing leadership**

The study found evidence that federations are able to offer a greater range of leadership opportunities at all levels, both in the provision of formal continuing professional development and in opening up leadership opportunities that would not otherwise exist<sup>3</sup>.

- **Personalised learning**

Headteachers reported being more able to improve pupil learning and develop their schools to meet their identified needs.

- **Widen opportunities**

Wider range of learning opportunities available for children<sup>4</sup>.

NCSL's research also showed that opting for a hard federation could improve the running of your school, for example:

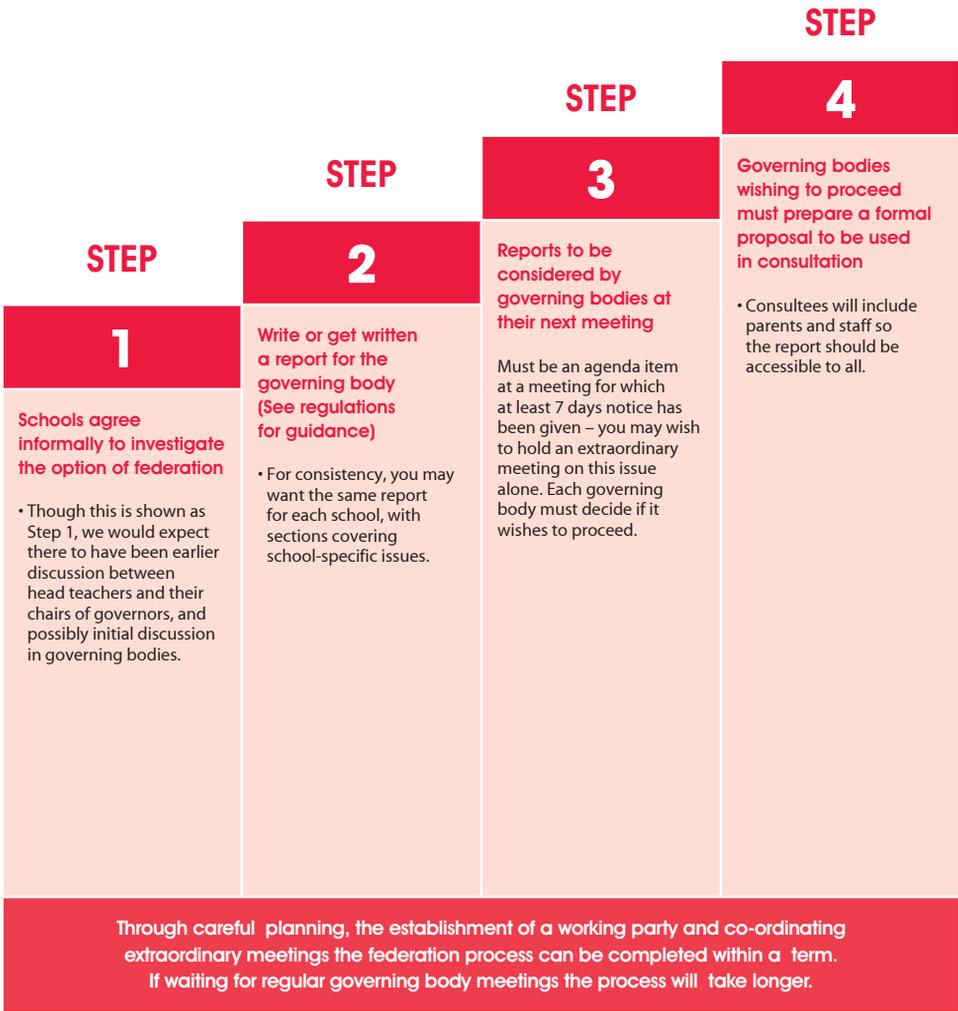
- Hard federations can employ a qualified School Business Director to centralise administrative functions and reduce the amount of finance, HR and estate management that falls to the headteacher(s) and so free up their time to focus on teaching and learning.
- Schools encountered less duplication of tasks.
- Greater buying power of their pooled budgets to bulk buy shared equipment and facilities that schools may not be able to afford on their own (e.g. shared Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can help bring schools closer together by using video conferencing for staff meetings).

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3. National College of School Leadership School Leaders Report, Can federations help stars to come out? (Research Associate Summary Autumn 2008).
  4. National College of School Leadership School Leaders Report, A study of hard federations of small primary schools (2007).

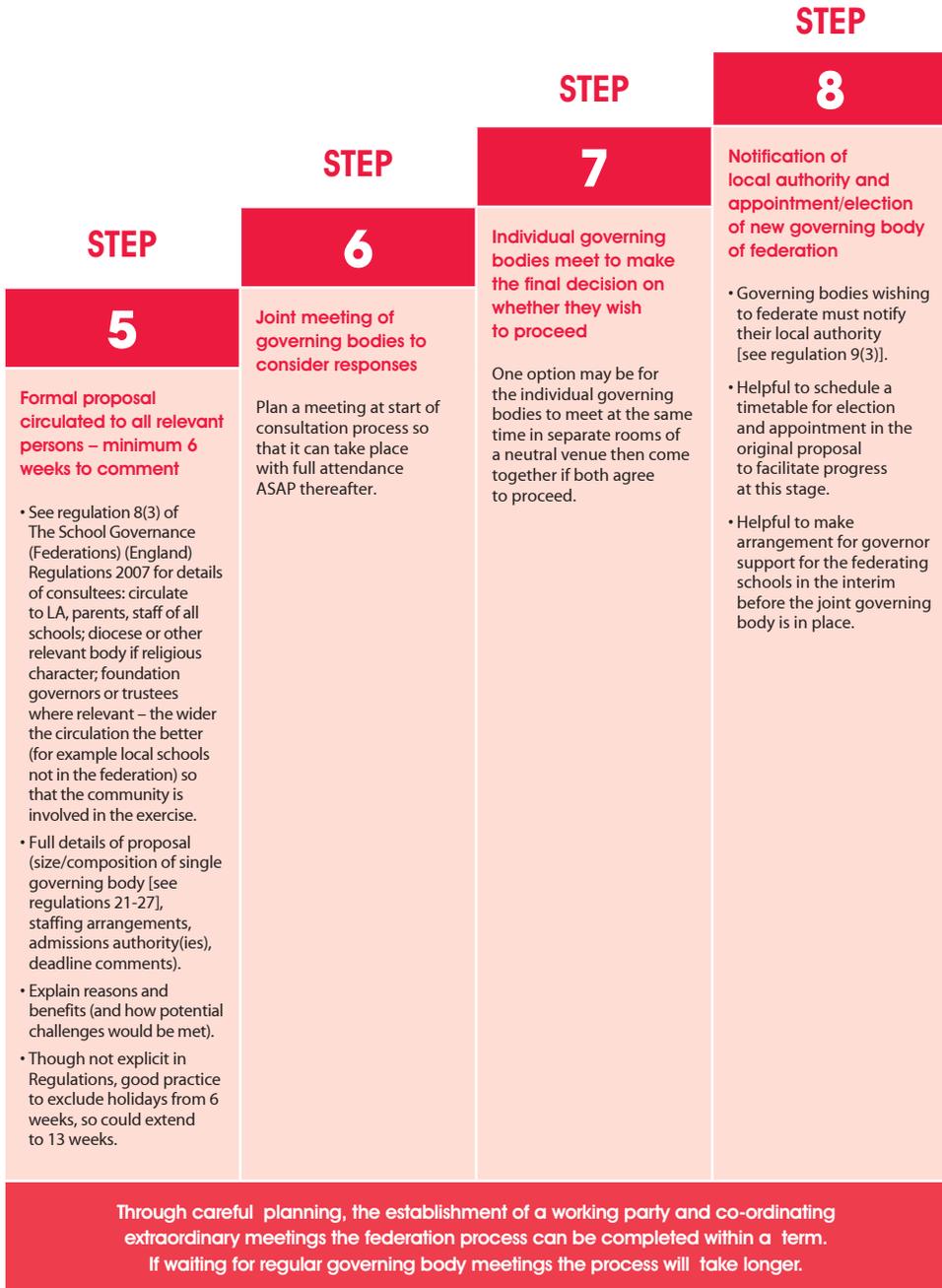
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## How?

### Step-by-step guide to hard governance federation



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### Your questions answered

#### Why hard federate – can't benefits be achieved through informal collaborations?

The hard federation structure provides a guarantee that the collaboration will be sufficiently high impact and permanent to generate significant and sustained improvements. The single governing body will be able to make any necessary changes and have flexibility to move staff and resources between schools.

#### Does each school keep its headteacher?

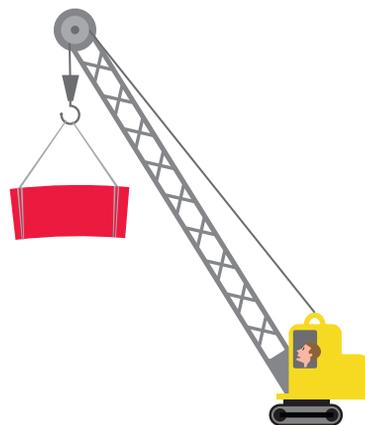
There are a number of leadership models for a federation:

- A single headteacher (often referred to as an 'Executive Head') for the schools in the federation who may have 'Heads of School' (who should be Deputy Heads) reporting to them.
- Each school has its own headteacher reporting to the Chair of Governors of the joint governing body; one of them may have some responsibility

for coordinating or leading the federation but he/she may not line manage the other head(s) with regard to their respective roles as headteachers of their schools.

- Each school has its own headteacher reporting to the Chair of Governors of the joint governing body but with a 'Chief Executive' (or similar title) with responsibility for coordinating or leading the federation or equivalent – but he/she may not line manage the other head(s) with regard to their respective roles as headteachers of their schools.

For more guidance on this issue visit [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/federations/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/federations/)



### Who employs the staff?

This will depend on the category of schools which are federating. One of the main benefits of federating is that it is possible to deploy staff across the federation. When a federation is formed, employment conditions for staff remain the same i.e. the local authority for voluntary controlled (VC) and community schools and the governing body for voluntary aided (VA) and foundation schools.

However, if a member of staff worked across a group of schools and the federation is made up of more than one category of school, for example, it included a VC and a VA school, then it is possible that:

- the member of staff could have two separate contracts with both the governing body and the local authority; or
- the member of staff could be employed by one body (either the governing body or the local authority), and have a formal agreement or secondment to the other, particularly if the arrangement was intended to be of limited duration.

### What happens to the school budget?

Each school in a hard federation remains a legally separate institution and maintains its individual base allocations (i.e. school budget based on local funding formulae which will take into account size, location, deprivation, and other factors) but schools may 'pool' budgets.

It is not necessary to federate to share resources. Any school may spend its budget on pupils in other schools whether a federation exists or not, and DCSF encourages local authorities to be flexible about this. However, federation formalises this and allows for improved, more coherent strategic and financial planning. For example, a hard federation could employ a qualified School Business Director; there would be economies of scale to be gained from cutting down on duplicated tasks and by combining the schools' budgets a School Business Director would be able to manage resources more efficiently across the schools. Federations could use their greater buying power of the pooled budgets.

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## What is the relationship between hard federations and the 21st Century Schools agenda?

School collaboration is at the heart of the 21st Century Schools vision of meeting the needs of every child, young person, their families and the wider community. Hard federation offers one of the most sustainable partnership models for schools looking to improve their delivery of extended services associated with the 21st Century Schools agenda.

## What are DCSF doing to support hard federation?

The Department is working to increase awareness of the opportunities offered by federation and to raise the profile of federation as a solution to some of the challenges faced by rural schools.

The Small Primary Federations conferences are part of a wider effort from the Department to facilitate school networking and the sharing of best practice information. In addition, the Department is in the process of delivering new guidance based on a series of federation case studies which help identify effective approaches to addressing the issues faced by schools in forming hard federations.



## More Information

If you require further information or advice on creating a hard governance federation, please contact us below:

Email: **federations.mailbox@dcf.gov.uk** with your query including full contact details.

Website: **www.standards.dcf.gov.uk/federations/**

A copy of the regulations concerning hard governance federation, **Statutory Instrument 2007/960** – can be found at **www.opsi.gov.uk/stat.htm**

For more details of the 21st Century Schools programme visit **www.teachernet.gov.uk/educationoverview/briefing/currentstrategy/21schools/**



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