



Guidance

Guide to setting up partnerships

Published 6 November 2018

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Introduction

Universities, independent schools and state-funded schools can all benefit from sharing their knowledge, experience and resources by working together.

You may already be working with other schools, colleges or universities in your area, or more widely through formal networks, and want to deepen your existing partnerships.

We strongly encourage partner schools to formalise their arrangements in order to clarify the activities and benefits for all involved. Evidence suggests that partnerships that enter into a formal agreement tend to be better formed and more sustainable. You can use our [template memorandum of understanding \(MOU\) and guidance](#) to help you do this.

Areas for collaboration

We want to encourage schools to build sustainable and reciprocal partnerships, across at least one of the following areas:

Teaching

This could include:

- taking part in national programmes, such as training science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teachers
- providing continuing professional development (CPD)
- sharing teachers in shortage subjects
- cutting teachers' workload by sharing lesson plans and resources

Curriculum

This could include:

- helping with curriculum design and delivery, such as lesson plans
- broadening the curriculum, such as forming mixed school classes in subjects such as languages and classics
- widening the curriculum offer, for example by making use of facilities at universities such as science labs
- organising attainment raising activities in school holidays

Leadership

This could include:

- taking a leading role on the governing body of a school
- providing senior and strategic leadership support
- offering coaching and mentoring

Targeted activities

Support tailored activities to meet a school's specific needs such as:

- academic support and mentoring for young people applying or preparing for university
- working together through [teaching school alliances](#)
- working with local authorities to open up opportunities to vulnerable and looked after children, such as offering boarding, day places or extra-curricular activities

Schools or universities with a record of giving this kind of support will be in a stronger position if they decide they want to become an academy sponsor or open a free school in the future.

Become an academy sponsor

We strongly encourage universities and independent schools with the capacity and capability to sponsor an academy or establish a free school.

Guidance is available on:

- the steps to [sponsor an academy](#)
- [establishing and developing a multi-academy trust](#)

Set up a new free school

Guidance is available on [opening a free school](#).

[The New Schools Network](#) will support you through the application process.

Open a maths school

We have guidance for universities on [how to open a maths school](#).

Finding schools to work with near you

Your [regional schools commissioner's office](#) will be able to tell you the school improvement priorities for academies in your area.

If you want to expand your partnership and work with several schools at once, you could contact multi-academy trusts, local authorities or teaching schools in your area.

The opportunity area programme aims to improve social mobility in 12 'coldspots' in England. If you're based in or near an opportunity area consider how you could help with the priorities listed in their [strategic delivery plan](#).

Setting objectives

Everyone involved should agree their objectives and how they'll work together to achieve them. A clearly defined set of objectives should reflect the strengths and needs of everyone involved.

Together you should decide:

- the aims of the partnership
- who will be the project lead from each institution
- what specific activities, year groups and subjects the partnership will cover
- what measures will be used to monitor performance
- how you'll measure the outcomes and impact of the partnership
- how you'll evaluate the partnership – what data you'll use, and how it will be shared and analysed
- the form of your partnership agreement, such as through a [memorandum of understanding \(MOU\)](#)

You should also decide together how you'll fund the partnership, if necessary.

Schools have found it useful to outline their objectives and partnership activities through a non-binding formal agreement. You can set this up using a [MOU](#)

Once the governing bodies of both partners have agreed a plan or MOU you can get started.

It's essential that you are clear on what you hope to achieve and by when.

Monitoring and evaluation

Collect accurate and timely data about your partnership to make sure you're achieving your objectives.

Use this information to:

- adjust how you allocate time and resources in the short term to get the best outcomes
- make decisions about future investment and strategy

Data available to partnerships

You'll probably need to gather both:

- quantitative evidence – such as attainment data or rates of application to higher education
- qualitative evidence – such as interest in the subject or confidence in applying to university

Performance data can show the progress of groups of pupils sharing certain characteristics relative to the progress of their peers. For example, those who are eligible for free school meals.

This can provide a rich data set for partnerships when considered with other characteristics, such as ethnicity, disability, parental education and occupation, or the area where a student lives.

Although some data sets will be more readily available than others, a good working relationship should allow you to make use of existing data in a pragmatic and meaningful way.

Comprehensive advice on evaluation can be found in [The Magenta Book](#), HM Treasury's guidance on evaluation.

Evaluation checklist

Consider these points when planning your evaluation.

Rationale

Have you all agreed:

- the scope of the evaluation and how you'll do it?
- what your short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals are?

Timing and resources

Consider:

- the timescales for achieving your objectives
- the timescales for collecting and analysing the data
- how often you'll review your progress
- what budget and resource are available
- what your quality assurance process is

Feasibility and identifying data requirements

Consider:

- when you'll measure the effects of your work
- how you'll be able to collect the evidence you need
- how you'll make use of existing evidence or learn from other partnerships
- whether there are any technical issues
- what indicators you'll use to show the effect of your work during the partnership

Standards and approaches

Consider:

- what tools you'll use to show the effect of your work
- how you'll make sure you conduct a robust evaluation
- whether you'll commission external evaluation, or make use of expertise within the partnership
- consulting the [Nesta standards of evidence](#)

A strong evaluation is one that is successful in isolating the effect of your intervention from all other potential influences. This will produce a good estimate of what would have happened if the partnership had not gone ahead.

Ethics

Consider:

- if there are ethical issues involved in collecting the necessary data
- whether you have the right permissions in place
- whether your permissions are [GDPR compliant](#)

Consent and data security

Has everyone involved in providing or collecting data:

- given their consent?
- been informed about the nature of the intervention and data collection and use?

You should consider writing a data management plan that meets data security and privacy needs.

Sharing your findings

Consider:

- what the findings will be used for, and what decisions they'll inform
- how the findings will be shared

If you plan to share the findings with a specific group – such as funders, governors or Ofsted inspectors – think through how much they need to know and what format you'll use.

If you are a university, you should include your commitments and the results of your partnership work to date in your Access and Participation Plan. The Office for Students has published [guidance to help you prepare your plan](#).

Additional resources

- [Independent state school partnerships evaluation](#)
- [The DIY Evaluation Guide from the Education Endowment Foundation](#)
- [The Magenta Book: guidance on evaluation from HM Treasury](#)
- [Raising Attainment through University-School Partnerships: Universities UK](#)

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