Inspiring leaders to
improve children's lives

National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Academies: research into the leadership of sponsored and converting academies

Resource

Contents

Executive summary

In September 2010, the National College commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) to research leadership in established and newly converting academies, focusing on what is distinctive about leading successful academies as well as what the conversion journey looks like in practice.

The findings from this study will be used by the National College to understand what additional support academy leaders might need.

The executive summary is structured under the following headings:

— Background and aims of the study

— The wider school improvement context

— Approach to this study

— Key findings

— Implications for leadership development

Background and aims of the study

The academies programme was established in 2000 to improve schools with persistent low achievement or schools situated in communities with little or no educational aspirations. Academies were also intended to become part of local strategies to increase choice and diversity in education, while continuing to be inclusive, mixed-ability schools.

In July 2010, the Academies Act was passed by Parliament. This gave all schools in England the freedom to become an academy, subject to the conditions laid down by the secretary of state for education. Since these changes were implemented, the programme has gathered momentum, and as at 1 March 2011, 195 schools had converted to academy status, all of them with an 'outstanding' Ofsted inspection grade. However, as the programme evolves it will include a greater range of schools, other than those involved in this research, including those that are not rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

In September 2010, the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (National College) commissioned a team led by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) and involving Dr John Dunford and Robert Hill to undertake a research project focusing on:

— established academies[1] in order to understand what is distinctive about leading a successful academy, and the leadership development implications of this

— recently converted academies[2] in order to establish an improved understanding of what is distinctive about leadership of these academies and the conversion journey, and what this looks like in practice

The National College will use the research findings to inform what action it should take to support leaders in all academies.

The wider school improvement context

It is important to note the changes signalled in the most recent white paper The Importance of Teaching (2010)[3]. These provide the broader school improvement context within which both sponsored and converting academies will operate and develop in the years ahead.

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1   In this report we refer to 'established academies' as sponsored academies.
2   In this report we use the term 'converting' to describe schools that are in the process of converting to academy status or that have already converted. It is important to note that a number of these schools may have a sponsor. However, this arrangement is not typical among converting academies. No centrally held data is available to quantify the number of schools converting under these arrangements.
3   Department for Education (2010) The importance of teaching. London: The Stationery Office.

The white paper indicates the coalition government's desire to move away from what it sees as a highly centralised strategy for improving schools. Examples of this centralised approach include centrally driven target setting, improvement initiatives, ring-fenced funds, targeted grants and national field forces.

In contrast, the coalition government views its role as putting in place the structures and processes to challenge and support schools to improve, and stepping in where schools are failing. In the main though, it believes that the primary responsibility for improvement should rest with schools themselves. The aim should be to create a school system that is more effectively self-improving.
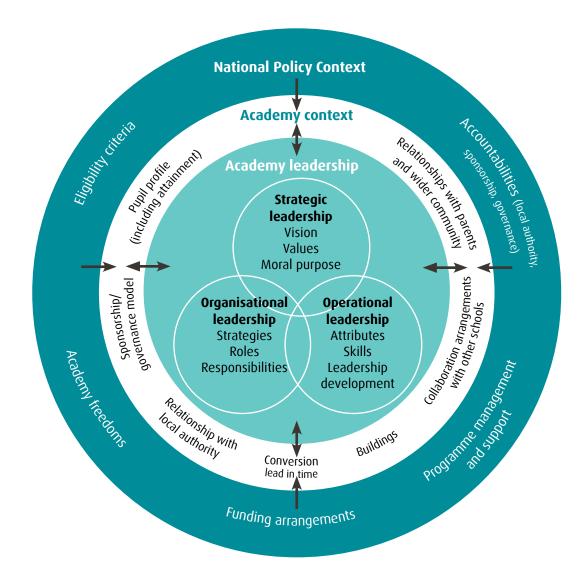
Approach to this study

The methodology for delivering this research project comprised three stages (Figure 1).

Stage 1 involved undertaking an overview of academy policy and research studies and undertaking 15 depth interviews with key national stakeholders.

Stage 2 involved undertaking 20 case studies with sponsored and converting academies and interviewing 78 senior and middle leaders (including governors). In addition, we undertook two surveys, one with all sponsored academies and the other with all converting academies.

Stage 3 involved undertaking detailed analysis of the policy and research studies, the case studies and the survey data. To assist with the interpretation of the findings, an analytical model was developed for the study (shown opposite). The model is an adapted version of that developed by Adair (2006) and extended to fit the focus and aims of the study.

Figure 1: Analytical model developed for the research

Key findings

Understanding the importance of academy context

'School improvement researchers initially proposed universal principles which were applied generically to all schools. However in recent years, they, along with others concerned with school redesign, have focused not only on what is common and patterned among schools, but what is unique to each one.'

Lupton, 2003. Cited in Thompson[4], 2010:66

Understanding the context within which academies operate is critical to developing an understanding of what is distinctive about leading an academy. The context of the school includes the challenges that the school faces and these challenges influence its motives for becoming an academy.

— Context includes a range of factors such as socio-economic background of pupils and the previous status of the school (eg grant-maintained (GM), foundation or trust). In addition, context includes the school's history of relationships with the local authority and its partnership work with other schools.

— The findings suggest that independence and autonomy are key motivating factors in themselves for both sponsored and converting academies, but for different reasons. For example, financial autonomy and increased levels of funding were of particular importance for converting academies to enable them to achieve better value for money and better student outcomes, whereas the primary motivation for independence in sponsored academies was to use their independence to help raise standards rapidly.

— The challenges in moving to academy status were linked to the motivations for becoming an academy. For sponsored academies, with the new freedoms and additional resources that accompanied academy status, came enormous pressure to achieve rapid improvement. Therefore, the subsequent challenges for leaders in these academies were of a strategic and operational nature, and included, for example, revisiting the vision and ethos of the school and realigning leadership

structures. Each of these was directly linked to improving pupil outcomes.

— In comparison, the challenges for leaders in converting academies, with the exception of managing opposing stakeholders, were largely administrative and procedural, and were not linked to pupil outcomes. The administrative nature of the process for converting academies suggests that academy status for these schools was viewed as an opportunity to gain or, in the case of former GM schools, regain autonomy from the local authority rather than an opportunity to do things radically differently.

Sponsorship, governance and the relationship with the local authority

'As the white paper made clear, we believe that governing bodies should be the key strategic body in schools, responsible for the overall direction that a school takes. In that respect, governors are also therefore the key body for school improvement.'

Lord Hill, 2011

Converting to academy status has implications for school leadership and management and in this regard, sponsorship, governance and the relationship with the local authority are important contextual factors. There will be changes in terms of governance for all schools that convert to academy status. In addition, academy status signals a new relationship with the local authority for all academies and, in turn, independence from the local authority will affect the nature and degree of collaboration with other schools. Headline findings include:

— Sponsored academies were generally of the view that **sponsors** add value in many ways. For example, 71 per cent of survey respondents from sponsored academies indicated that the sponsor provided them with access to new networks/contacts, and 70 per cent of survey respondents indicated that the sponsor contributed to the ethos and values of the academy.

— In contrast, converting academies were generally averse to having a sponsor, with 70 per cent of survey respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing that not being required to have a sponsor is a good thing. For converting academies that were open to the idea of having a sponsor, the consensus was that, whilst the sponsor should have educational expertise,

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4   Thompson, P. (2010) Whole school change: a literature review. Newcastle upon Tyne

their main involvement should be to offer more tangible contributions, such as additional resources or finance.

— In sponsored academies, the structure and function of **governance** changed with academy status. For example, academies with chain sponsorship have two tiers of governance (one operating at a central level for all academies within the chain and a separate local governing body for each academy). This was reported to have resulted in sharper scrutiny of performance. Governors, under the direction of the sponsor, played a key role in both setting and communicating the new vision and ethos of the school.

— Apart from the new legal obligations, the case study data for converting academies indicated that there had been little change in either the composition or role of the governing body. However, governors recognised that they had taken on more responsibility for accountability. Converting academies started from a higher base in terms of the skills and attributes of governors already in place.

— Both sponsored and converting academies indicated that there was still a role for the **local authority**, but primarily as a service provider. Sponsored academies indicated that there had been a shift in the balance of power, with the local authority now having to compete with other providers in the marketplace for their business. However, in approximately one-half of sponsored academies, the relationship with the local authority had weakened. This shift in power was less evident for converting academies, many of which already had a distant relationship with the local authority; indeed, some case study schools felt overlooked by the local authority in terms of the expertise they could share with other schools in their area.

  • A majority (78 per cent) of sponsored academy survey respondents believed that their local authority should have some degree of continuing involvement with their academy (eg, in terms of co-ordinating admissions).

  • A similar proportion of respondents in converting academies indicated that the local authority should have some type of involvement, for example, in the provision of operational support/services such as human resources (HR) support, which academies can buy into.

  • The cost of buying in services from the local authority was highlighted as an issue by both sponsored and converting academies.

— Academy status brings new opportunities for **collaboration with other schools**. The research indicates that for converting academies, academy status itself has had little impact to date on the nature and degree of collaboration. However, few schools (including those that are national support schools (NSSs)) had plans to reduce the amount of collaboration and, in particular, primary schools expressed an interest in not only maintaining current levels of collaboration but also a desire to expand their networks with other schools.

— Collaborative arrangements between sponsored academies and other schools varied depending on, for example, the sponsorship model, or the history of relations with other schools. The fact that 93 per cent of survey respondents in converting academies were interested in becoming a teaching school suggests that this new policy initiative may help to progress collaboration between converting academies in particular, and other schools.

Leading an academy

'As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation.'

Leithwood et al, 2004

Three aspects of leadership were explored in the research: **strategic leadership, organisational leadership, and operational leadership**.

Strategic leadership was found to be strongly influenced by the context of the school. In particular, for academies, the research suggests that it is important to take account of the starting-point at the time of converting in terms of pupil attainment. The focus of strategic leadership for sponsored academies was developing and delivering a transformational vision for education, while for converting academies the focus was on building on the existing platform of excellence and using academy status as an enabler to raise standards even further.

The nature of the challenges for strategic leadership were linked to the school's motives for becoming an academy, and the school's vision and values reflected this:

— The key challenge for sponsored academies was to implement organisational change with the aim of achieving the vision of the school which was primarily focused on raising standards (68 per cent of survey respondents in sponsored academies indicated that raising pupil attainment was their biggest challenge, followed by pupils' background and/or interest in learning (54 per cent)).

— Converting academies already had a strong ethos and vision in place. The key challenge for them was to use their financial autonomy so that they could continue to be a centre of excellence in terms of educational provision (65 per cent of survey respondents in converting academies indicated that funding and financial resources was their biggest challenge, followed by buying in support services (33 per cent)).

For **organisational leadership**, the key finding is that sponsorship has influenced the leadership model and structure in sponsored academies, and there was a distinctive business feel to how they operated. Leadership structures in converting academies tended to be more 'traditional'[5] (ie, typically a headteacher supported by one or more deputy heads and assistant heads with a number of middle leaders working together in a single school and including a degree of distributed leadership). It is important to note that there were exceptions to this. There was also some commonality between sponsored and converting academies about the strategies used to improve the quality of learning and learning outcomes.

Other key findings include the following:

— Senior leadership in sponsored academies has tended initially to be more directive in order to drive school improvement. However, it has also been accompanied by giving middle leaders greater responsibility and accountability for teaching and learning strategies. The research suggests that sponsored academy trusts that incorporate more than one school were able

to develop leaner senior leadership structures due to leadership responsibilities operating, for example, across phases.

— Sponsored academies were using a wider range of leadership strategies. For example, 76 per cent of sponsored academy survey respondents indicated that they monitored performance data to pinpoint gaps in pupil attainment and progression more than they had done in their previous maintained context.

— Whilst, in contrast, the leadership structures in converting academies tended to be more traditional (as defined above), some interviewees suggested that they did have plans to use their academy freedoms to change the leadership model. Therefore, a wider range of leadership models/structures may emerge within converting academies as the programme develops. Given the attainment profile of these schools, it was not surprising that most converting academies had no immediate plans to use their freedoms to radically change their teaching and learning strategies.

For **operational leadership**, the research evidence points to some common ground between respondents in sponsored and converting academies in relation to the attributes and skills that were more important for leaders in an academy context:

— A majority (69 per cent) of sponsored academy survey respondents and 64 per cent of converting academy survey respondents indicated that being excited by autonomy and freedom was an important leadership attribute to have.

— Sponsored and converting academies agreed on four of the top five skills that were more important in an academy context. These included: financial management/budgeting skills, political/diplomatic skills, dealing with accountability, and change management skills.

However, the responses of sponsored and converting academy leaders were also marked by a difference of emphasis:

— Leaders in sponsored academies rated risk-taking and creative and decision-making attributes more highly than converting academy leaders when comparing attributes with those needed in the maintained sector.

— When it came to financial management/ budgeting skills, converting academy respondents rated this as being more important to have in an academy context by a margin of 68 per cent to 52 per cent.

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5   The independent study into school leadership conducted in 2007 (PwC, 2007a) on behalf of the then Department for Children, School and Families (DCSF), identified five leadership models, namely: traditional leadership models; managed leadership models; multi-agency managed leadership models; federated leadership models; and system leadership models. A review of the case study data suggests that most converting academies were operating a traditional leadership model. The research indicated that under this model the leadership team comprised exclusively qualified teaching staff and typically included a headteacher supported by deputy and/or assistant heads. In the research, this model predominated in the primary sector but was also common, albeit to a lesser extent, in secondary schools.

It is important to note that sponsored and converting academy leaders' responses are, in part, likely to reflect both the context and experience of the schools they were working in prior to becoming an academy.

Other key points to note:

— The majority of respondents from sponsored academies indicated that they would welcome support from the National College, or other providers, in a range of areas, including leadership development (79 per cent), leadership of teaching and learning (71 per cent), networking and collaboration (68 per cent), management of staff performance (68 per cent), and development and talent identification (67 per cent).

— The majority of respondents in converting academies identified a need for training in three main areas: financial management (69 per cent), leadership development (56 per cent), and networking and collaboration (52 per cent).

— Most academy interviewees highlighted the importance of providing bespoke training which takes account of the context of the academy. Linked to this point, many respondents stated that training should be differentiated in terms of the roles and responsibilities expected within the context of the academy.

— The overwhelming view from interviewees was that the training should be designed and delivered by professionals with experience and knowledge of academies.

Implications for leadership development

The findings from the research in this report are used to propose ways to support and strengthen leaders across all parts of the academy sector. Several specific areas are identified for further consideration, and these are described below.

— **Training and research to support governance/ sponsorship**: The research identifies a need for training for chairs of governors that reflects the different challenges and contexts facing sponsored and converting academies. It also points to a need to increase knowledge and understanding among converting academy leaders and governors of the operation and potential value of academy sponsorship. This could be achieved through regional networks, national conferences and also the work of teaching schools.

— **Preparing leaders for the expansion of academy chains**: The research suggests that the growth of chains is likely to continue apace and that there is a need to help academy leaders think through the implications of this (eg, the risks associated with scaling up operations). The research also suggests that there is a need to support the development of executive leaders, given the likelihood of an increase in applications for academy status from secondary and primary schools coming together on a cross-phase basis.

— **Supporting academy leaders to develop wider system roles**: The research suggests that there is a high level of interest in converting academies to become a teaching school. It would be useful to use teaching schools as a potential vehicle for embedding school-to-school support and collaboration across the system. In addition, and given the requirement for academies to collaborate more widely as a result of taking on academy status, there is a need to support the development of networking and collaborating skills in order to facilitate the wider role of academy leaders.

— **Supporting leadership capacity-building and improvement**: Given the range of leadership challenges identified by sponsored and converting academies, continuing support should be made available to academies that need or request assistance. The planned expansion of national leader of education (NLE) and local leader of education (LLE) programmes could provide a basis for continuing to support academies that need or request assistance.

— **Understanding and enhancing the skills and attributes required by leaders in an academy context**: The research suggests that there are particular skills and attributes that are more important for leaders operating in an academy context. It would be useful to review, as planned, these qualities and behaviours and the accompanying commentary set out in the National College (2011) publication Achieving excellence in academy leadership. Other important implications include the following:

  · There is a need to provide newly appointed academy leaders with peer support so that they have the confidence and skills to understand and take full advantage of the freedoms associated with academy status.

  · Given that the research findings indicate that nearly two-thirds of academy leaders expect significant changes in leadership roles over the next three to five years, support

is required for leaders to understand and prepare for these changes.

- It is important to provide support to leaders to enable knowledge-sharing within the academy system.

- It would be useful for senior leaders in academies to have support to understand and learn how to manage the changing roles and relationships between academies and local authorities.

— **Developing middle leaders (and supporting succession planning)**: The findings from the research indicate that there is a need for bespoke leadership development support that takes account of the context of academies. This should be differentiated for different levels of leadership and delivered in partnership with academies. In addition, the findings highlight the need to address the differential in existing opportunities for leadership development assignments, or secondments, that are available to academy leaders. For example, our research suggests that leadership development opportunities are more widely available to leaders in academy chains in comparison with free-standing academy trusts or academies with single sponsors.

— **Developing the skills of school business managers (SBMs)**: Aspiring academy leaders need to be fully aware of the financial strategic roles and responsibilities that are part of working in an academy context. SBM training needs to keep pace with developing thinking and practice.

1. Introduction

This section of the report sets out the background and high-level policy context within which the research project was undertaken. It is structured under the following headings:

— Background

— Wider school improvement context

— Aims of the research

— Research questions

— Purpose and structure of this report

Background

The last government approved a programme to establish 400 academies. Of this number, 203 were opened by May 2010, and as at 1 March 2011 the coalition government had overseen the opening of a further 69[6].

The original objectives of the academies programme were to address the problem of entrenched failure within schools with persistent low academic achievement or schools situated in communities with little or no educational aspirations. Academies were also intended to become part of local strategies to increase choice and diversity in education, while continuing to be inclusive, mixed-ability schools.

Sponsored academies have a number of features which distinguish them from maintained schools. In particular, they are free from local authority control; they are led by sponsors who come from a wide range of backgrounds (eg, business and voluntary sector); they are free (within certain limits) to adapt the national curriculum to suit the needs of their pupils; they are able to set their own pay and conditions for staff; and they can change the duration of terms and school days[7].

In July 2010, the Academies Act was passed by Parliament. This provided the legislative framework to enable all schools in England to have the freedom to become an academy, subject to the conditions laid down by the secretary of state for education. The first schools invited to convert under the new arrangements were those assessed as 'outstanding'

by Ofsted. In September 2010, the first 32 schools (including 25 secondary schools) converted under the new arrangements.

Since the Academies Act was passed (and since this project was commissioned) the secretary of state for education has extended the range of schools eligible for academy status such that:

— from November 2010, schools assessed by Ofsted as 'good with outstanding features' are automatically eligible to become an academy

— schools other than those judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding' or 'good with outstanding features' need to apply in partnership with an existing academy or join an existing academy trust with a proven record of school improvement in order to apply for academy status

— from 1 January 2011, special schools became eligible to apply for academy status[8]

Since these changes were implemented, the programme has gathered momentum, and as at 1 March 2011, the following had taken place:

— 638 applications to convert to academy status had been received by the Department for Education (DfE), including those that have already opened

— 434 academy orders had been signed

— 195 schools (including the 32 indicated above) had converted to academy status

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6   The status of one of these academies has yet to be confirmed by the Department for Education.

7   In practice, many maintained schools have been able to benefit from many of these freedoms in the past, eg, the freedom to alter the length of the school day or school term, though with academy status, this formalises these freedoms.

8   We understand that only a small number (c 6-10) of the schools that convert in 2010/11 will be special schools.

Other significant changes include the following:

— The sponsored academy programme is being reinvigorated with a new simplified framework for sponsors that are sponsoring their first academy or moving to become a multi-sponsor.

— The secretary of state for education expects local authorities to put forward underperforming schools for academy status and has advised them of his powers in the new Academies Act to make an academy order in respect of any school that is eligible for intervention[9].

— An education endowment fund of £110m has been established for local authorities, sponsors and high-performing schools for which they can bid in order to access funds to improve performance of poorly performing schools (DfE, 2010).

The main differences between sponsored academies and those converting under the new arrangements are that the latter:

— will not necessarily serve areas of high deprivation

— will not be required to have an external sponsor (the academy trust that is created is expected to delegate management of the school to the governing body)

— will not be required to establish an endowment fund

— will not be subject to routine school inspection by Ofsted (if they are rated as 'outstanding') though there are safeguards in place for cases where school-level performance deteriorates substantially from one year to the next

— will convert in a shorter timescale (typically less than one year)

— will receive relatively modest project start-up funding of around £25,000 from the DfE, compared with the substantial sum allocated to sponsors and trusts to support the creation of academies with a new teaching and learning ethos and model

— are expected to support another school or schools

It is important to note that even within these classifications (ie, sponsored and converting), significant variation exists within, as well as between, these categories. The variation in relation

to sponsored academies is well documented in PwC's academies evaluation reports (PwC, 2007b; 2008) and elsewhere (Curtis et al, 2008), with context being a key factor in explaining the differences. Throughout this report, but particularly in section 4, we make specific reference to the importance of context in interpreting the research findings of this project.

Wider school improvement context

It is also important to note the changes signalled in the most recent white paper The Importance of Teaching (HM Government, 2010). These provide the broader school improvement context within which both sponsored and converting academies will operate and develop.

The coalition government has moved away from what it sees as a highly centralised strategy for improving schools. The 2010 white paper signals a different approach to school improvement in that it does not consider that centrally driven targetsetting, improvement initiatives, ring-fenced funds, targeted grants and national field forces constitute the right approach.

The coalition government views its role as putting in place the structures and processes to challenge and support schools to improve, and stepping in where schools are failing. However, it believes that the primary responsibility for improvement should rest with schools themselves. The aim should be to create a school system which is more effectively self-improving. Therefore, the following changes determine the context within which academies of both types operate:

— School improvement partners (SIPs) are to be abolished.

— Every school is to have access to the school-led support it needs by a doubling of the number of national and local leaders of education (NLEs and LLEs) and the introduction of specialist leaders of education (SLEs).

— A national network of teaching schools, based on the concept of teaching hospitals and designated by the National College, is to be established to:

  · provide and assure initial teacher training (ITT) in an area

  · provide high-quality professional development for teachers

  · offer leadership development

  · enable school-to-school support

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9 This includes specifically schools that Ofsted has judged to require special measures or significant improvement, or which have failed to respond to a valid warning notice.

- A £110m education endowment fund is to be established for innovative projects that raise the attainment of deprived children in underperforming schools.

- A new collaboration incentive worth £35m a year is to be created to reward schools that help weaker schools improve their performance.

- An education professional – typically a serving or recent headteacher – will provide challenge and make recommendations about the level of support needed by a primary, secondary or special school that is below the new floor standards, or is judged by Ofsted to require a notice to improve or special measures.

- Much of the support for underperforming schools is to be provided by other schools, through NLEs, LLEs, SLEs and other school-based models.

- Further intervention (including arranging for a high-performing academy/sponsor to take over the school) is to take effect where schools are below the floor standards, judged inadequate by Ofsted and/or not progressing.

Aims of the research

In September 2010, the National College commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC), working with Dr John Dunford and Robert Hill, to undertake research to gain a greater understanding of what it means for a successful school to convert to academy status, the leadership implications of doing so, and to explore whether leadership in academies has a distinctive nature and, if so, how this differs from leadership in maintained schools.

This research project focused on:

- established academies in order to understand what is distinctive about leading in an academy, and the leadership development implications of this

- recently converted academies in order to establish an improved understanding of what is distinctive about the leadership of these academies and the conversion journey, and what this looks like in practice

The National College will use the research findings to inform what action it and other stakeholders should take to support leaders in schools that are converting to academy status. In addition, the National College may also use the findings to understand what additional support leaders in sponsored academies might need.

Research questions

In addition to the aims of the research (detailed above), a number of research questions guided this study. These are detailed in Table 1.1.

Purpose and structure of this report

This report contains all of the findings from the research project, together with conclusions and recommendations which the National College and other stakeholders may wish to take forward. The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Methodology

- Analytical model

- Overview of academy policy and research studies

- The importance of academy context

- Sponsorship, governance and the local authority

- Leading an academy

- Conclusions and implications

Table 1.1: Research questions

For sponsored and converting academies	— How does the leadership context at all levels in academies differ from that in maintained schools and what are the implications of this for leaders? — What are the key leadership skills and attributes required by senior and middle leaders in academies? How are these developed and what are the leadership development challenges? — How do the vision, values and moral purpose in sponsored academies contribute to their success? How does this differ in those converting? — How are the leadership challenges and issues facing sponsored academies that have replaced a weak or failing school different from those of outstanding schools that are converting? — What are the key leadership strategies senior and middle leaders use to improve learning and learning outcomes in academies, and what evidence is there that they are effective? — What do the leadership structures in academies look like and how do they maximise the value of learning and teaching outcomes? — How does the relationship with local authorities and wider services impact on leadership in sponsored academies? — How do the above differ according to academy context including all-through academies and chains and between sponsored and converting academies?
For converting academies	— What does it mean to convert from a successful maintained school to academy status? — What are the implications for primary and special schools of having academy status and what can they learn from existing all-through academies? — What are the leadership implications of transition/conversion? In particular, given the requirement for outstanding schools that convert to support another school, what forms of support are being offered and what difference is this making? — As some of the schools converting will be led by a national leader of education (NLE) and be supporting another school already, how does conversion affect this role? — What is the impact of conversion on existing partnerships with other schools? How does it affect the provision of services formerly provided by the local authority? — What are the implications of conversion for leadership and leadership roles, including the role of school business managers?

2. Methodology

This section of the report sets out the methodological approach used to deliver the research project. It is structured under the following headings:

— Overview

— Details of activity undertaken

Overview

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the research activity undertaken to deliver this project.

Details on activity undertaken

Expanding on Figure 2.1, Table 2.1 illustrates the methodology used to deliver this research project. However, a number of contextual factors should be noted when making comparisons both within and between sponsored and converting academies. These include:

— At the time the research was carried out, both sponsored and converting academies involved in the research were at different stages of development. For example, whilst the majority of converting academies had converted at the time the survey was administered, a sizeable proportion were in the process of converting.

— Similarly, some sponsored academies had been open for a longer time than others. For example, 17 per cent of respondents to the sponsored academies survey came from academies that had opened between 2003 and 2006, and 83 per cent from academies that had opened between 2007 and 2010.

Figure 2.1: Overview of methodology

Stage	Description	
1 Desk-based research and stakeholder consultation	— Overview of available policy documents and research literature — Stakeholder consultation with National College, DfE, Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), Local Government Association, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), Unions, Foundation, Aided Schools and Academies National Association (FASNA), Independent Academies Association (IAA), Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Oasis Community Learning, National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and Association of Learning Technology (ALT)	Dissemination / consultation events with academies (October 2010, January and March 2011)
2 Primary research (a) academy case studies (b) academy surveys	— Interviews with senior and middle leaders in 20 academies, including: · 10 sponsored academies (autumn 2010) · 10 converting acadmies (spring 2011) — Academy surveys, including: · all sponsored academies (autumn 2010) · all converting academies (spring 2011)	
3 Analysis and reporting	— Interim report - November 2010 — Final report - March 2011	

— Whilst staff turnover was not explored as part of this research, there are differences in terms of the length of time respondents were employed in their academy. The research indicated that 27 per cent of respondents in sponsored academies had been in post for more than 4 years in their school, compared with 56 per cent of respondents in converting academies.

— In addition, whilst almost all converting academies were high-achieving schools, some were more highly achieving than others. For example, in almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of the converting academies that took part in the survey, 65 per cent or more of pupils who took GCSEs in 2010 achieved 5 A*-C grades (including English and maths). The remaining 35 per cent of

schools had between 35 per cent and 64 per cent of their pupils attaining 5 A*-C grades in their GCSEs (including English and maths).

Therefore, whilst general comparisons are made between the views of respondents in converting and sponsored academies, it should be noted that their views may reflect not only their academy type, but also the length of time the academy has been in existence and the length of time that survey respondents have been employed in their respective academies. In addition, over time, the academies programme will become more diverse, as more schools convert to academy status, including those that do not have an 'outstanding' Ofsted rating. These contextual variations are further discussed in section 3 and the other sections of this report more generally.

Table 2.1: Methodology

Stage	Task	Description
1	Overview of available policy documents and research literature	— A detailed overview of the literature was undertaken at the beginning of the project and was used to inform the development of the topic guides and survey instruments. — A wide range of sources was reviewed, including reports from the academies evaluation that PwC undertook between 2003 and 2008, academies research undertaken by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2007; 2010), and the study undertaken by Davies and Macaulay (2006). More recent work undertaken by the National College (2011) examining the qualities and attributes required by academy leaders is also included.
	Stakeholder consultation	— A key part of the early research activities involved a series of depth interviews with key stakeholders. In total, 15 interviews were undertaken with stakeholders including those in government departments, non-departmental public bodies, organisations representing academy interests, and teacher unions.
2	Academy case studies	— A total of 20 case study school visits (or telephone interviews) were undertaken over the course of the research project. In autumn 2010, 10 case studies were undertaken with sponsored academies, and 10 were undertaken with converting academies in the spring of 2011. It is important to note that a number of the converting academies had only converted in February 2011. — Two stratification matrices were compiled to ensure an appropriate mix of both types of academy in the sample. — For each case study school up to four interviews were conducted*. In summary, a total of 78 interviews were conducted. The breakdown is as follows: · 40 interviews with senior leaders · 31 interviews with middle leaders (eg, heads of department) · 7 interviews with members of governing bodies

* In one of the case study schools, the academy principal could facilitate just two interviews, whilst in another – a primary school – the head could facilitate a total of just three interviews given the size of the school. In primary schools in particular, heads tend to have teaching responsibilities.

Stage	Task	Description
	Academy surveys	— Two academy postal surveys were carried out as part of the research. Each school received a pack of five surveys for senior and middle leaders. — The first survey was administered to sponsored academies in autumn 2010. The effective sample was 186 academies[**], 56 of which (equivalent to 30 per cent of all of these academies) returned at least 1 questionnaire. — The response rate, ie, the total number of questionnaires returned as a proportion of the total number of questionnaires distributed, was 19 per cent. — The second survey was administered to converting academies (ie, academies that either had converted or had plans to convert in 2010/11). The effective sample was 226 academies and 64 of these (28 per cent) returned at least 1 questionnaire. — The response rate, ie, the total number of questionnaires returned as a proportion of the total number of questionnaires distributed was 18 per cent.
3	Analysis and reporting	— The notes from the interviews completed in each case study school were combined into one case study write-up. The case studies were structured using the themes contained in the topic guide. — The themes were mapped to the survey for both sponsored and converting academies so that survey data would further substantiate (or not) and elaborate on the case study findings. — In the conclusions section of this report, a summary of the key research findings for sections 5-7 linked to the research questions is provided. There are also implications of the findings for the National College.
n/a	Dissemination/ consultation events with academies[***]	— Three dissemination/consultation events were held in October 2010, January 2011 and March 2011. — Their purpose was two-fold: to share the background, aims and objectives of the research project with attendees, and to invite contributions in relation to a number of the research questions. — The first event included representatives from sponsored academies only. The second event included representatives from converting academies only. The third event included representatives from sponsored and converting academies.

[**] The sample excluded schools that had participated in the case studies and a small number of other schools that did not wish to participate in the study.
[***] These consultation events catered to primary and secondary schools only. From 1 January 2011, special schools with an Ofsted rating of outstanding were able to apply for academy status. As there were not sufficient numbers converted at the time of the project, special schools were not included within the scope of this research project.

3. Analytical model

This section of the report presents the analytical model that was developed for interpreting the research findings from this study. It is structured under the following headings:
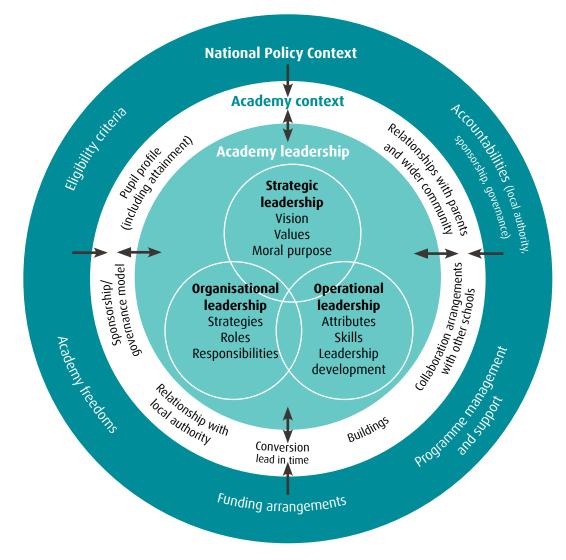
— Introduction

— Details of the model

Introduction

In order to organise the findings from this study, an analytical model which maps to each of the research questions was created. The model presented in Figure 3.1 is an extended version of that developed by Adair (2006) and extended to fit with the focus and aims of this study.

Details of the model

— The outer circle represents the national policy context within which the academies initiative is positioned. It identifies the main policy issues that have, or are having, an impact on how the academy programme has been developing.

For example, when the previous government dropped the requirement for sponsors to make

Figure 3.1: Analytical model developed for the research

a financial contribution to establishing a new academy, it opened up academy sponsorship to a whole new range of sponsors including universities, colleges and high-performing schools. This not only extended the scope of the sponsors involved in driving the expansion of the academies programme, but has provided a new means of engaging higher and further education institutions in the delivery of compulsory schooling.

Similarly, the coalition government's decision to establish the converter strand of the academy programme, based on outstanding schools, provided a new dimension to the programme. The decision to streamline the criteria that academy sponsors have to meet as a condition of being considered for sponsoring further academies is another factor which, when linked with the provision that enables all schools and encourages underperforming schools to seek academy status with an approved sponsor, is likely to result in an expansion of academy chains.

In other words the national policy context has a direct impact on how the academies programme develops. Many of the national policy issues are explored further in section 4.

— The middle circle represents the individual academy context. The issues listed in this circle describe the local factors that affect the operation of an academy. For example, a sponsored academy with an underperforming pupil profile will, in terms of its teaching and learning strategy, have a very different focus from an academy that is already outstanding and whose pupils come from an advantaged background. Similarly, an academy that is part of a federation or chain will usually have a significantly different form of governance from one that is not. In addition, management of an academy's relationship with a local authority is likely to be different depending on whether or not it was established with the support and encouragement of the authority.

Even the lead-in time for becoming an academy can be an important contextual factor. Sponsored academies normally have had up to a year to plan for change. This has provided both the time and resources to consider from first principles the teaching and learning, and the governance models the organisation wishes to adopt. Converting academies, on the other hand, have normally had a matter of months to manage the transition to academy status, with much of this time being spent on addressing the necessary technicalities of the conversion process rather than more strategic issues.

These issues are further discussed in section 5 (where we present the findings relating to the context of academies prior to and since becoming an academy), and in section 6 (where we focus on the changes that academy status brings in terms of sponsorship, governance and the relationship with the local authority and other schools).

— The inner circle describes the three aspects of leadership identified by Adair (op cit). These have been developed to apply specifically to academies. Again, context influences how these factors operate within academies. For example, the values and culture of an academy for which the priority is to raise standards rapidly, is likely to be different from a converting academy that sees academy status primarily as gaining financial autonomy from the local authority in order to continue to maintain the high standards it already enjoys. Likewise, the organisation, deployment and development of leaders will be different for an academy that is part of a federation or chain than one which is a free-standing academy trust.

These issues are further discussed in section 7.

4. Overview of academy policy and research studies

This section of the report provides an overview of the available policy documents and research literature in relation to academies.

Much of this overview relates to sponsored academies as there has been little specific research undertaken in relation to converting academies.

This section of the report is structured under the following headings:

— The academies programme

— Leading an academy

— Summary and discussion

The academies programme

Background

The academies programme, even before the most recent changes were introduced by the coalition government, has been a constantly evolving programme. Many of the sponsored academies were established to replace previously weak or failing schools, and most served areas of high social deprivation. In the early years of the programme, it was expanded to include city technology colleges (CTCs) and a small number of independent schools (Curtis et al, 2008). This meant that even before the recent expansion, the programme already included a diverse range of school types.

The current legislation includes a number of changes to the eligibility criteria. As indicated in section 1 of this report, schools with an Ofsted rating of outstanding were prioritised for academy status in September 2010. In November 2010, eligibility was further extended to schools that were rated by Ofsted as 'good with outstanding features'. In addition, applications were encouraged from groups of schools, provided that at least one of them was rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Academy freedoms

Both sponsored academies and converting academies have a range of freedoms associated with their status. The Public Accounts Committee (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2011) suggests that this is what unifies the academies programme as a single entity. However, it also suggests that there is a clear difference between sponsored academies seeking to raise educational standards in deprived areas and the new converting academies, which already perform well academically. There has been, and continues to be, an expectation that these new freedoms will lead to greater innovation, for example in teaching and learning, and improved attainment levels. Further, a key objective of the academies programme is for the new academy to contribute to raising performance/standards in other schools, as well as in its own. This latter objective is discussed further below.

Evidence from the fifth annual report of the longitudinal evaluation of the academies programme carried out by PwC (2008) suggests that in relation to teaching and learning, sponsored academies were generally operating in similar ways to improving schools in the local authority maintained sector, namely monitoring and improving the quality of lessons, ensuring appropriate continuing professional development (CPD), and tracking and monitoring pupil progress.

Other literature in this area, for example a recent paper published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Do Quasi-markets Foster Innovation in Education? (OECD, 2009), suggests that a refocus on policy innovations (to give schools greater freedoms) may not, on its own, lead to substantial impact on classroom practice. The paper argues that there is considerable literature on the weak association of governance policy to classroom practice, and considerable resistance in education systems to substantive reform.

Glatter (2009) offers a slightly different perspective, which suggests that while greater autonomy is positively correlated with student performance,

certain conditions must be in place for this to be achieved. Key among these is that the core responsibilities of school leaders must be focused on educational matters to avoid what Glatter terms the role overload that increased autonomy might generate. This must be accompanied, Glatter believes, with more appropriate models of distributed leadership, and appropriate forms of training and development.

In terms of the impact of academies on pupil attainment, the evidence is more consistent, with several research or evaluation studies suggesting that the academies initiative has had a positive impact. A National Audit Office report (NAO, 2010) suggests that most academies are achieving increases in academic attainment for their pupils compared with their predecessor schools. Although still below the national average, the proportion of their pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent is improving at a faster rate than maintained schools with similar intakes. Notwithstanding this, a small number of academies have made little progress, particularly when English and mathematics are taken into account.

What is not entirely clear from the studies cited above is the specific contribution that greater freedoms and independence have made to improvements in standards. The research would suggest that a whole host of changes (eg, behaviour and school uniform standards, curriculum changes, teaching and learning practice new/revised school policies) have together contributed to raising standards. PwC (2008) systematically reviewed and evaluated the distinctive features of academies, put them in their wider context and set them beside local and national comparators. The conclusion reached was that there is no simple uniform academy effect, since there is a complex range of variables interacting within each academy. There is, for example, evidence that sponsorship, governance, strong leadership, buildings and teaching and learning are all impacting positively upon school improvement, but it is not possible to disaggregate any one variable. It is also important to take account of the changing individual contexts and changing profile of academy pupils.

Accountability within the academies programme

Role of the local authority

The academies programme was launched in 2000 with an expressed aim of radically challenging underperformance in schools that had low levels of attainment. One of the ways this was to be achieved was by giving academies freedom and independence from their local authority. The rationale was that freeing academies from local authority oversight, and some of the associated regulatory frameworks, would provide schools with the autonomy and flexibility to develop innovative approaches to school improvement. PwC (2008) found that whilst independence was one of the more controversial aspects of the programme, many sponsors and principals saw it as a major enabler of school improvement. However, the PwC research also found wide variability across academies in the ways in which they chose to exercise their independence.

Whilst many of the earliest academies enjoyed significant freedom from local authority control, the PwC academies evaluation suggests that local authorities have increasingly become involved in planning academies in their area. PwC (2008) found that local authorities were encouraged to include plans for academies as part of their secondary provision and that it was becoming increasingly common for local authorities to act as joint sponsors of academies. The NAO (2010) report recognised that establishing a new academy prior to the Academies Act (2010) required the support of the local authority. The report highlights a number of examples where the local authority played a prominent role in co-ordinating the development of several academies in its area.

The Academies Act (2010) changed this by removing the requirement for the local authority to approve plans to establish an academy in its area. As such, it has removed what had amounted to a local authority veto over the types of provider it could commission in its area. The Act also removed the requirement to demonstrate either failure of existing supply, or the need for more school places, in order to create new schools or school places. Although academies are largely independent from local authority control, and manage their own arrangements, for example, in relation to exclusions, they are required to participate in their local authority's fair access protocol, which requires all schools in an area to admit children with challenging behaviour, even where this exceeds agreed admissions. The NAO (2010:4) indicated that 74 per cent of academies surveyed reported that they are participating in these protocols. PwC (2008) highlighted that whilst academies are not required to participate in local authority strategic planning of services for children and young people, they are encouraged to do so.

Sponsorship

Sponsored academies (ie, those that took on academy status prior to the most recent changes to the eligibility criteria in 2010) are required to have a sponsor. PwC (2008) indicated that, overall, sponsorship had contributed significantly to school improvement. Sponsors were bringing a range of business expertise and acumen to their academy and its leadership team. Additionally, it was found that they had an unremitting focus on improvement and were consistently challenging the academy's leadership and staff in this area.

Whilst single sponsors were more numerous in the early years of the academies programme, PwC (2008) suggests that multiple academy sponsorship has become more widespread over the course of the evaluation. The typical pattern for multiple academy sponsorship is a single umbrella organisation sponsoring a number of academies. Sponsors can be individuals or groups (such as faith groups, charitable trusts or universities). At the time of PwC's evaluation, one sponsor was responsible for up to 13 academies, although it is important to point out that there is no formal limit on the number of academies a chain sponsor can operate[10]. More recently, a number of joint sponsorship arrangements (where academies have more than one sponsor) have included a local authority sponsor. Most of the literature on academies highlights the central role played by sponsors, particularly for the first wave of academies.

The NAO (2010) report states that staff, parents and governors interviewed attributed their academies' business-like practices, positive values and renewed focus on educational improvement to the sponsor's influence. The role of the sponsor is further discussed by Davies and Macaulay (2006) in a report for the SSAT on academy leadership. In their view, the quality of advice and support that the sponsor provides, as well as the accountability relationship through the governing body, have been critical for the success of the academy. This mirrors evidence presented in the fourth annual report of the longitudinal evaluation of the academies programme (PwC, 2007b; PwC, 2008) where the overall conclusion in relation to the sponsor was that sponsorship contributed significantly to school improvement. It was noted that academies obtained a broad range of expertise not just directly from the sponsor but also from the sponsors' business and personal associates.

Whilst most of the research studies attribute at least some of the success of academies in raising

standards to the sponsorship model, there are stakeholders who remain sceptical. Curtis et al (2008) express a general reservation in involving the private sector in education. Specifically in relation to academies, they suggest that some critics see sponsorship as largely unaccountable sponsors having significant influence over the direction of a publicly funded school.

Governance

Academies are managed by academy trusts, which are companies limited by guarantee with charitable status. Each academy has a governing body which governs the academy on behalf of the trust. A trust may include one or more academies. The NAO (2010) found that on average academies had 13 governors, which is a similar number to those of maintained schools. The sponsor appoints the majority of governors. In addition to including sponsor representatives, the governing body should include a local authority representative, the principal in an ex-officio capacity, and a parent (NAO, 2010).

The sponsorship arrangements can have a significant impact on the governance model in place. PwC (2008) identified two main governance models: local governance (associated with philanthropic sponsorship and group sponsorship) and collective governance (associated with high-achieving school sponsorship and multiple academy sponsorship). The first of these – local governance – has trustees that are specific to one academy and that are usually represented on the governing body. This model of governance is usually associated with individual sponsorship. The second model – collective governance – involves the trustees and governing body acting as two separate layers of governance. The trust is responsible for strategic decisions across all the schools in the group. Alongside this, governing bodies work at a local level in each individual academy within the group. This model of governance is associated primarily with multiple academy sponsorship. Academies in this model are bound by the decisions made at a strategic level.

More recently there has been a move towards a corporate model of governance in academies. The establishment of academies and trusts has moved the governance of schools away from a stakeholder model, where individuals, such as parents, have a key role to play on the governing body. According to Hill (2010), a corporate sector model is becoming more prominent and whilst there are still places as of right for parents, the governing body has taken on a more non-executive role, with individuals recruited for their expertise and experience.

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10   In a more recent study (Hill, 2010), United Learning Trust was reported to be sponsoring a total of 17 academies.

As indicated earlier, converting academies are not required to have a sponsor. However, the governing body in converting academies has to comply with legislation and take on trust status, as outlined above. To date, there has been no research undertaken to examine how this will affect, if at all, schools that will convert under the new arrangements. Given that the first schools to convert will all have an Ofsted rating of 'outstanding' and will not be subject to routine inspections or school improvement partner (SIP) visits, governors in these academies need to ensure that the necessary challenge is generated either internally or by buying in external support, in order that educational standards continue to remain high. The research findings in this report will provide some further insights into this.

A challenge for all academies in the future, whether sponsored or converting, is to ensure that their governing body is sufficiently rigorous in how it spends public money. The Public Accounts Committee (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2011) noted that in the past, many academies did not have adequate financial controls, and that going forward the governing bodies of all academies should comply with basic standards of governance and financial management. This should include segregation of key roles and responsibilities, and timely submission of annual accounts.

Relationships with parents/carers and the wider community

Establishing productive relationships with parents/carers is critical to contributing to the success of the academy. In the very early days of establishment of a sponsored academy, it must engage with parents to gain their confidence in order to fill the school places.

In particular, in areas of high social deprivation, where relationships with parents/carers and the wider community have in the past been poor, it is important that academy leaders establish good relationships with parents/carers to raise the aspirations not only of their pupils but also of the wider community.

Evidence, for example, from the NAO (2010) suggests that in common with the maintained sector, many academies visited were experiencing challenges in involving parents and members of the community in the day-to-day business of the school.

Collaboration with other schools

Both PwC (2008) and the NAO (2010) found that collaboration between sponsored academies and other schools had been poor initially but had improved over time. In addition, the nature and extent of collaboration was influenced in part by the sponsorship arrangements. For example collaboration and networking between academies that operated as part of a chain were strong within the group, whereas these academies tended to collaborate less with other schools outside the group. It is not entirely clear how schools that convert to academy status will collaborate with other schools in the system.

The government's recent white paper The Importance of Teaching (HM Government, 2010) contains little detail on this issue other than to indicate that it will establish funding to both encourage collaboration (through the education endowment fund discussed earlier) and to reward it with the establishment of a new collaboration incentive worth £35m each year that will financially reward schools that support weaker schools to demonstrably improve their performance while also improving their own. Notwithstanding this, there is an expectation that converting academies will engage in collaboration with other schools and support them in improving standards. This expectation will be included in the converting academy funding agreement.

Programme management, support and funding

In relation to sponsored academies, the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) before that) were responsible for programme management and support. As many of the sponsored academies were entirely new-builds, the former department had to develop and buy in expertise in project management, construction management and educational improvement in order to manage and deliver the programme (HM Government, 2010:7).

PwC (2008) suggested, given the plans for the expansion of the programme, that some of the functions of the department be given to a new or existing non-departmental public body. In April 2010, the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) was established. The YPLA carries out academy functions, across the full age range, such as calculation and payment of grants and supporting and challenging academies on behalf of the government. Its remit includes all academies (both sponsored

and converting). The Department for Education[11] continues to retain responsibility for commissioning and opening new academies.

The government provides three main types of funding to sponsored academies: initial grants for the revenue costs of feasibility planning and the implementation of plans to establish an academy; capital grants for buildings; and funding for running costs once the academy is open. In addition, sponsored academies have received substantial revenue funding to plan and support transformational change. The start-up funding arrangements have been quite generous, particularly those relating to capital. In addition, sponsors themselves were originally required to make a financial contribution to the capital cost of a new academy building. More recently, in 2007, they were required to establish an endowment fund for the academy. Recent evidence from the Public Accounts Committee (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2011) suggests that the gap between what was originally pledged by sponsors (whether capital or endowment sponsorship) and what was actually provided is wider than perhaps was expected. The recoverability of these debts remains in doubt and sponsorship is no longer a feature for schools converting under the new arrangements.

There are no plans to provide academies converting under the new arrangements with start-up funding or specific capital funding, though schools are entitled to a flat grant of £25,000 to cover costs such as those relating to obtaining legal advice on the necessary documents for setting up an academy, the process for transferring staff, new signage and stationery. In terms of funding for the running costs of academies, general annual grant (GAG) funding will be based on the level of local authority funding already calculated for the school prior to it becoming an academy. Grant payments to academies to replace local authority services depend on the level of central spend in the particular local authority, and will vary from one local authority to another. As local authorities cut expenditure on central services, the amount schools will receive may reduce.

Under the new arrangements, all academies, whether sponsored or converting, are required to have a funding agreement in place. This provides the framework within which an academy must operate. The ongoing funding of an academy is contingent upon the conditions in its funding agreement being met. The fact that there are now two distinct groups of schools within the academies programme (ie, sponsored and converting) poses a challenge to the DfE going forward and this was noted as a key

challenge in the recent Public Accounts Committee report (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2011), when it indicated that these two distinct dimensions to the programme increase the DfE challenge in ensuring sound management and accountability. The DfE is aware of these issues and has plans in place to address the identified challenges.

So what does this all mean for leading an academy? The freedoms associated with academy status, the accountabilities within the academy programme, and aspects relating to its funding and management each has the potential to impact on the model and structure of leadership and implications for the skills and attributes required to lead an academy. The following sub-section explores the existing research literature in relation to leading an academy; however it is important to note that there have been very few discrete studies on academy leadership and all of the literature relates to sponsored academies.

Leading an academy

The role and practice of effective school leadership in contributing to school improvement.

School leadership, alongside increased freedoms and accountability mechanisms, is a critical component in securing positive outcomes across the education system and increased autonomy for school leaders is fundamental to the concept and operation of academies. Almost all of the literature on school leadership suggests that increased autonomy is an essential component in creating the conditions for school improvement. However, research suggests (see Glatter, 2009 and OECD, 2009) that increased autonomy is not always accompanied by improvements in standards. McKinsey & Co (2010:8), who undertook a detailed study of eight education systems globally, affirm this point by indicating that

"differences in what leaders do are not directly related to the level of autonomy they are given. Internationally, there is no relationship between the degree of autonomy enjoyed by a school principal and their relative focus on administrative or instructional leadership."[12]

Notwithstanding this, McKinsey & Co also found in their study that school leaders had a considerable

11   See www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/academies/news/?version=1

12   McKinsey & Co (2010) Capturing the leadership premium: how the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future. London: McKinsey.

amount of freedom and autonomy, and that there appeared to be a relationship between this and school performance, where there are strong accountability mechanisms in place.

McKinsey & Co (2010) found that successful school leaders have a key role to play not only in providing strong leadership in their own school (eg. setting the vision and direction), but they are also distinguished by their desire to take on system leadership roles that involve supporting other schools to improve. McKinsey & Co identify the following roles that effective leaders demonstrate:

— setting the vision and direction; supporting the development of staff, and; ensuring effective management systems are in place

— they are motivated mainly by their ability to make a difference

— they focus more on instructional leadership and developing teachers

— they are more likely to report that they greatly enjoy teaching

— they are distinguished less by who they are, and more by what they do (though both are important). They spend more time working with the people in their school[13]

— they find supporting the improvement of other schools and leaders attractive and do this more frequently than other principals

Leadership structures

Sponsored academies have generally been successful in using their freedoms to distribute responsibilities (and accountabilities) further down their leadership structure. In addition, according to the DfE and the National College (DfE Academies Group and National College, 2010), sponsored academies have developed flatter leadership structures. They indicate in their joint study that all the academies they examined had made significant attempts to realign their leadership teams in such a way that structures were flatter, providing a wide range of leadership opportunities, at lower cost and with explicit links to the achievement of improved outcomes in the classroom.

As indicated earlier, there is evidence from PwC (2008) to suggest that multiple/chain sponsorship is increasing in pace. This particular form of leadership structure in these types of academy is typically flatter, and offers middle and senior leaders more opportunities to progress to different leadership positions across the family of schools, either by secondment or by commissioning family-wide middle leadership development programmes. Academies that are part of a chain will typically have an executive principal or chief executive officer, who will have a strategic role across the academy chain as a whole, for example in relation to monitoring standards. In Robert Hill's thinkpiece (2010) he provides an example of the types of responsibility held by one executive principal which included, among others: lesson observation and moderating judgements on the quality of teaching and learning, and attendance at monthly senior leadership team (SLT) meetings in each academy to give feedback to colleagues on the federation and to keep up to date with developments.

Leadership strategies

PwC (2008) found that strong and stable leadership was critical for the first academies, particularly in the early days when the vision and strategic direction were being set by the school leadership team and the sponsor. Davies et al (2006) talk about the importance of strong leadership values, underpinned by a strong belief on the part of academy principals in wanting to improve the lives and life chances of young people, born out of a sense of moral purpose and a desire for social justice. McKinsey & Co (2010) suggest that, according to almost all principals, setting the vision and direction of the school is one of the biggest contributors to success.

According to the DfE and the National College (DfE Academies Group and National College, 2010), establishing clear strategies to improve teaching and learning was identified as a key imperative in improving standards. Their report presented a number of leadership strategies that academies in their study had employed to raise the quality of teaching and learning, including:

— an approach to training and development which includes a commitment to high-quality initial teacher training focused on effective learning and teaching

— operation of a system of lead practitioners in teaching and learning that also act as mentors and offer support to other staff

— establishment of high-quality data systems so that all staff know as much about individual learners as possible

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13 This finding is supported by PwC's Independent Study into School Leadership (2007) which suggested that effective leaders adopt an open, consultative approach, and are visible.

— investment in strategies for the evaluation of performance at all levels and links to programmes of professional development; these should be robust and achieve a balance between accountability and development

Leadership skills and attributes

The National College (2011) states that the qualities and behaviours demonstrated by leaders are dependent upon both the experience of the leader, and the context of the academy. This has implications for the way in which the academy's vision is developed, communicated, and implemented. For example, emergent and early academy leadership will create and articulate a vision that has the potential to inspire, engage and align a range of stakeholders; established academy leadership[14] is about developing excellence by being able to articulate a high-quality vision that secures the commitment and engagement of stakeholders and/or partners across the academy; whilst extending academy leadership[15] requires a

more creative approach, and uses innovation to raise and extend achievement in order to secure the highest possible standards across a range of settings. In addition, extending academy leadership has an acute awareness of all the freedoms allowed by academy status, and uses these tactically and strategically to raise standards and disseminate excellent practice across the system.

In a recent review of the role and practice of school leadership, McKinsey & Co (2010:6) found that there is both a set of practices which effective leaders share, and a common set of beliefs, attitudes, and personal attributes which they possess. These are illustrated in Table 4.1 below.

Davies et al (2006) suggest that academy leaders should demonstrate a wide range of skills, including:

— high-quality political skills: Given the close public scrutiny of academies, particularly in the early years of the programme, academy principals are expected to demonstrate strong political skills both to manage negative perceptions of their academy among other schools in their area and to assist the school in raising awareness of what it can offer to a variety of stakeholders (other schools, parents and the wider community).

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14 The target groups include serving principals leading a single academy and serving heads of outstanding schools moving to academies.
15 The target groups include experienced principals leading a group of academies and advanced/system leaders, including those working in partnership with less successful schools.

Table 4.1: The practices of effective leaders and their beliefs, attitudes and personal attributes

Practices	Beliefs, attitudes and personal attributes
— building a shared vision and sense of purpose — setting high expectations for performance — role modelling behaviours and practices — designing and managing the teaching and learning programme — establishing effective teams within the school staff, and distributing leadership among the school staff — understanding and developing people — protecting teachers from issues which would distract them from their work — establishing school routines and norms for behaviours — monitoring performance — connecting the school to parents and the community — recognising and rewarding achievement	— focused on student achievement; puts children ahead of personal or political interests — resilient and persistent in goals, but adaptable to context and people — willing to develop a deep understanding of people and context — willing to take risks and challenge accepted beliefs and behaviours — self-aware and able to learn — optimistic and enthusiastic

— entrepreneurial skills: These include financial management skills (including, significantly, raising capital), personal motivation, a can-do attitude in terms of a passionate commitment to action, a tolerance of risk, and a mindset of 'where others saw problems, they saw opportunities.' Many of these skills are closely linked to and supported by the freedoms that academies have to innovate.

— decision-making skills: With increased autonomy comes increased decision-making opportunities. Davies and Macaulay (2006) argue that academy leaders need to further develop and refine their decision-making skills to maximise the benefits of their new academy status.

— personal and intra-personal skills: Davies and Macaulay (2006) argue that academy leaders need to have a number of personal characteristics in order to effectively lead an academy. These include personal resilience, positive mindset, ability to manage conflict, and risk-taking (which links to the point above). These intra-personal skills are particularly important in underperforming schools where the pressure to innovate and improve quickly is more accentuated.

The National College (2011) has developed a framework for the qualities and behaviours expected of academy leaders, whether sponsored or converting. The framework is a resource for leaders across the system, but particularly for leaders in an academy context, recognising that there are distinctive features of academy leadership that need a greater degree of focus and emphasis. Qualities and behaviours identified by the National College include:

— securing and maintain transformational change: This includes a range of qualities and behaviours relating to, for example, academy ideology (including support for its aims and objectives).

— demonstrating excellent political and entrepreneurial leadership: This includes qualities and behaviours relating to engaging with a full range of stakeholders (sometimes in challenging circumstances).

— establishing sustainable and accountable systems of organisation and governance: This includes qualities and behaviours relating to how academies are governed for the benefit of both academy stakeholders (eg, parents, pupils, other schools). It also includes important elements relating to capacity-building (eg, recruitment, retention and talent management).

— personal characteristics: This includes a range of attributes required by academy leaders in order for them to be successful. Examples of attributes thought to be important include: courage, humility, patience, tenacity, and resilience.

The areas identified by the National College are broadly consistent with those identified by Davies and Macaulay (2006) (eg, securing and maintaining transformational change).

Developing talent

Identification and development of leadership talent is a critically important task for school leaders and, the extent to which this is given priority, will have an impact on the leadership capacity of the system. McKinsey & Co identified three approaches that high performing schools use to develop leadership talent (outlined below). School leaders have an important role to play in helping to make sure that these approaches are used:

— The first depends primarily on self-identification by potential leaders and informal mechanisms by which potential leaders are coached and given opportunities to develop within schools.

— The second builds on the first by providing opportunities for potential leaders to take courses or join programs to build their capacity and interest in leadership.

— The third approach goes further, proactively guiding the careers of potential leaders so that they gain progressively greater leadership experience through new roles taken on within their schools with guidance and support.

There is also a recognition that not all leadership development opportunities (eg for middle leaders) should come from within schools; indeed schools can learn much from other schools through clustering and networking. McKinsey & Co (2010) found through their survey that lateral learning (schools learning from each other) is already common in all the education systems and that almost all principals (88 per cent of randomly selected and 94 per cent of high performers) visit other schools to learn from them at least once a year. However, their study suggests that for this to be effective it must also be accompanied by strong accountability mechanisms.

Summary and discussion

The academies programme, even before the most recent changes were introduced, has been a constantly evolving programme. Both sponsored

academies and converting academies have a range of freedoms associated with their status.

Whilst many of the earliest academies have enjoyed significant freedom from local authority control, local authorities had increasingly become involved in planning academies in their area, with some local authorities becoming sponsors of academies. It remains to be seen whether, despite the impact of the legislative changes that have had the effect of bypassing the need for local authority consent to establish an academy, authorities still play a role in sponsoring academies.

In terms of wider collaboration, research suggests that collaboration between sponsored academies and other schools was poor initially but that this has improved over time, and that the nature and extent of collaboration are influenced in part by the sponsorship arrangements. It has also been influenced by the context in which the academy was established. It has been suggested that it is more difficult to gauge the impact that sponsored academies have on the attainment of their family of schools. There is no research to date focusing on the impact of collaboration in converting academies.

There is a range of sponsorship and governance models in place in sponsored academies. Research suggests that sponsors have contributed positively to raising standards in their academy/ies. Converting academies are not required to have a sponsor, though they could potentially benefit greatly if they were to consider this as an option. However, they are required to comply with governance legislation and take on trust status. There is currently no available literature on the impact of academy status on performance in converting academies.

Recent research found that setting the vision and direction of an academy is one of the biggest contributors to success. Strong and stable leadership was found to be critical for the first academies, particularly in the early days when the vision and strategic direction were being set by the school leadership team and the sponsor. The qualities and behaviours of academy leaders are influenced by both the experience of the leader and the context of the academy, and this has implications for the way in which the academy's vision is developed, communicated and implemented.

In terms of leadership structures, sponsored academies have generally been successful in using their freedoms to distribute responsibilities (and accountabilities) further down the leadership team. In addition, sponsored academies have developed flatter leadership structures. There

was some evidence to suggest that multiple/chain sponsorship has been increasing in pace. The leadership structures in these academies are typically flatter and offer middle and senior leaders more opportunities to develop across the family of schools.

Academy leaders have employed a number of strategies to raise the quality of teaching and learning, including a commitment to high-quality initial teacher training and the operation of a system of lead practitioners in teaching and learning. Converting academies, of course, start from a different position in that they are 'outstanding' or 'good with outstanding features' already, but they face the leadership challenge of developing strategies to sustain their performance.

Research points to a number of skills that academy leaders should display. These include political skills, entrepreneurial skills, decision-making skills, and personal and intra-personal skills. In addition, the National College framework identifies qualities and behaviours that are expected of academy leaders (whether sponsored or converting). These include: securing and maintaining transformational change; demonstrating excellent political and entrepreneurial leadership; establishing sustainable and accountable systems of organisation and governance; and personal characteristics, such as courage, humility, patience, tenacity and resilience.

As outlined above, most of the existing research in relation to leadership in academies has focused on sponsored academies, and many of these schools have focused on using their academy status to improve attainment within their own school. However, due to the increasing number of outstanding schools converting to academy status, there is a need, as the issues above indicate, to develop a greater understanding of what it means for leaders in a successful school to convert to academy status, and in particular what the implications are for leadership development, both for these schools and for schools that can convert to academy status by forming a partnership with a high-performing school. The remaining sections of this report present the findings from the research that explored these issues in detail with leaders in both sponsored and converting academies.

5. The importance of academy context

Academies, whether sponsored or converting, operate within a particular context.

By examining the local context, we can gain a better understanding of the particular implications of conversion for leaders in different school types.

This section is structured under the following headings:

— Introduction

— Context prior to becoming an academy

— Motivations for becoming an academy

— The conversion journey

— Summary and discussion

Introduction

PwC (2008) found that the first 27 academies had a range of contextual variations in relation to, for example, pupil profile, sponsorship, governance and leadership. In addition, since the programme commenced in 2000, academies have been operating in a fluid policy context and subsequently there is now significant diversity in the range of schools involved in the programme. It is, therefore, important to take account of the contextual variations in both sponsored and converting academies when investigating the implications of academy status for leadership. This section of the report explores the context of schools prior to becoming an academy, and linked to this, the motivation of leaders in pursuing academy status. It concludes by reporting on the experience of leaders in the process of converting to academy status, and the challenges this presented.

Context prior to becoming an academy

Each school that enters the academy programme does so within a particular context and this will inform both its motivations for wishing to become an academy and the conversion journey. Lupton (2003) suggests that in recent years, school improvement researchers, along with others concerned with school redesign, have focused not only on what is common among schools, but what is unique to each one. Lupton states that it was assumed that a universal set of principles could be applied generically to all schools to enable school improvement to take place. However, in more recent years, the focus has shifted slightly to understanding school improvement in terms of both what is common among schools, and also what is unique to each school (ie, context differs widely between schools and the strategies needed for school improvement therefore need to be different in response).

Table 5.1 summarises the contextual factors applicable to sponsored and converting academies prior to becoming an academy. It is important to note that not all these factors are relevant in each circumstance; indeed, every academy will have its own unique contextual profile. The purpose of this comparison is to illustrate the broad contextual variations within which each group of academies operates prior to conversion, and to highlight the challenges and opportunities these present for academy leadership.

Table 5.1: Context prior to becoming an academy

Contextual factor	Sponsored academies	Converting academies
School phase/type	— The vast majority are secondary with a relatively small proportion being all-through — Prior to becoming an academy, most schools were local authority maintained	— Approximately three-quarters of schools are secondary and the remainder are primary — Many of the early converting academies were formerly grant-maintained (GM) schools and had foundation or trust school status prior to conversion. One-half of the case study schools had GM status at some time in the past
Socio-economic background	— Typically serve areas with high social deprivation as indicated by high levels of free school meal (FSM) entitlement	— The case studies suggest that these schools typically serve areas of low social deprivation with FSM entitlement below the national average
Standards	— Prior to becoming an academy, educational standards have usually fallen below (sometimes well below) expected national standards. For example, of the first 24 open academies*, there were only 2 where 35 per cent or more of pupils who took their GCSEs achieved 5 A*-C grades in 2002, the year in which the first academies opened (PwC, 2008)	— Standards are significantly higher than average as reflected in an Ofsted judgement of 'outstanding'. For example, 65 per cent or more of pupils who took GCSEs in 2010 achieved 5 A*-C grades (including English and maths) in almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of the converting academies that took part in our survey** — Notwithstanding the above, some stakeholder interviewees raised an issue that a number of 'outstanding' schools converting to academy status may have been inspected over four years ago under an older Ofsted inspection framework, which was viewed to be possibly less rigorous than the current inspection framework
Relationships with parents/carers and wider community	— Relationships with parents/carers and the local community were variable, and this may in some instances have been reflected in falling pupil enrolment	— Relationships with parents/carers and the local community are typically positive and these schools enjoy their strong support and loyalty. Many of these schools are oversubscribed
Governance/ sponsorship	— Governance prior to academy status was variable in terms of the skills and expertise and the capacity to govern — For most schools, academy status involved a radical change in governance, with the sponsor having significant influence — Accountability of governors shifted from the local authority to the sponsor	— A range of skills and expertise is evident among governors, and there is a high degree of capacity to support and challenge

* Only three of these academies had opened in 2002. Therefore, for 21 (of the 24) academies, these GCSE results relate to the predecessor schools.
** This compares with one-sixth of sponsored academies which achieved this standard in 2010.

Contextual factor	Sponsored academies	Converting academies
Relationship with the local authority	— The quality of the relationship with the local authority prior to academy status is variable, depending on school context — Relationship post-academy status is often dependent on a local authority's support for the academies programme and whether the local authority had been involved in encouraging or promoting the establishment of an academy	— The relationship with the local authority prior to conversion ranged from indifferent and distant to confrontational and challenging — A number of the case study schools felt overlooked by their local authority in terms of the expertise they could share with other schools in their area
Lead-in time	— In general, sponsored academies reported having more lead-in time (between six months and in some instances more than one year) to make the transition to academy status — It is important to note, however, that a number of sponsored academies had only one term to transfer to academy status, thus limiting the amount of time they had to plan for, and introduce, change	— Conversion lead-in time is typically much shorter than for sponsored academies - many report having to work over a relatively short period of time (often as little as three months) to prepare for opening as an academy
Collaboration with other schools	— Typically a recipient of help/ support from other schools rather than a provider, except that within academy chain schools, mutual support and leadership is provided across the chain — Collaboration is generally not well developed following academy status as the school is more inward focused	— Some have been providers of support to other schools (eg, as an NSS), and have used academy status to formalise school improvement partnerships between schools — Generally collaboration is not well developed and some schools have tended to be more inward looking and insular in their approach to school improvement — Further collaboration is included in the plans of most converting academies
Buildings	— Prior to academy status, buildings are typically in a poor state of repair and in need of significant investment — Therefore, capital investment was a strong motivation for some schools in seeking academy status	— Not discussed and no evidence available from the literature

Table 5.1 points to a number of implications for academy leadership:

— All the converting academies that participated in the case studies had an Ofsted judgement of 'outstanding' and one-half of them were formerly GM schools. Therefore, leaders in converting academies had experience of operating with a greater degree of independence and autonomy from the local authority.

— Most sponsored academies had educational challenges prior to becoming academies including lower than average educational standards, and a higher proportion of challenging pupils. In contrast, the majority of converting academies were already high performing prior to academy status and had a more balanced pupil intake. This means that the starting-points and the issues for leaders to consider in terms of the purpose and opportunities presented by academy status were very different.

— Linked to the above, the purpose and nature of collaboration in sponsored and converting academies prior to academy status were very different, with the former being more of a beneficiary than the latter. Notwithstanding this, collaboration within converting academies varied and some schools were more inward focused. A few schools had plans to progress collaboration with other schools. The key point is that the leadership expectations and responsibilities in terms of future collaboration at the time of converting will be very different for the two sets of schools.

— In terms of the sponsorship and governance arrangements in both sets of schools, leaders in sponsored academies faced a radical change in the way in which the school was governed prior to converting, and not least the challenge of developing a new relationship with a sponsor. In contrast, for leaders in converting academies, the majority of governing bodies will continue with business as usual, and there were no additional relationship implications in terms of sponsorship.

— Bearing in mind the above, it is perhaps not surprising that the conversion lead-in time has typically been longer for most (but not all) sponsored academies, than for converting academies, with the former having an average lead in time of more than six months to accommodate significant changes that often accompanied conversion to academy status (eg, closing the predecessor school, reopening in new/refurbished school buildings). For converting academies the process for converting has been much shorter, given that many of the substantive changes are of a legal and administrative nature.

Motivations for becoming an academy

Whilst independence from the local authority is a common motivating factor for almost all academy leaders, the reasons for pursuing this are contextual. In sponsored academies with low attainment, the motivation is to raise standards rapidly using the academy freedoms, coupled with the additional financial resources from government and sponsorship, whereas for leaders in high-achieving converting academies, the primary motivation for independence is financial autonomy (including access to additional funding previously controlled by the local authority) and the freedom to continue to do what works best for the school, without local authority constraints.

Table 5.2 presents a range of factors that case study schools suggested were important motivations for becoming an academy.

From Table 5.2, the following observations are notable:

— Leaders in both sponsored and converting academies were motivated by freedom from the local authority; however, for sponsored academies there was the added incentive of securing substantial sums of capital investment from government and from sponsorship. These academies replaced local authority control with sponsorship, and leaders were motivated by the opportunity to rethink the vision and ethos of the school. Therefore, for sponsored academies the motivation for becoming an academy was tied up with the opportunity and challenge of making radical changes and seeing radical improvement in the school. This is in contrast to converting academies which were not concerned with changing the management and governance of the school, nor the school ethos; rather the primary motivation of leaders was to achieve financial independence from the local authority in order to enjoy greater autonomy and fewer constraints.

Table 5.2: Factors motivating schools to become an academy

Domain	Sponsored academies	Converting academies

Strategic/operational	— Freedom from local authority control – a motivating factor for some, though not all, sponsored academies
	
	— Greater freedom to manage and prioritise resource allocation over a longer period
	
	— Substantial sums of capital investment (from both government and sponsors)
	
	— Freedom to achieve better value for money, through, for example:
	  • replacing services previously provided by the local authority
	  • collaborating within a cluster of schools/chain of academies
	
	— Freedom to introduce sponsorship arrangements to help ensure greater accountability for educational standards
	
	— Freedom and, in most instances, time to rethink the vision and ethos of the school
		— Freedom from local authority control
		
		— Freedom to manage own finances and prioritise resource allocation over a longer period
		
		— Freedom to achieve better value for money, through, for example:
		  • replacing services previously provided by the local authority
		  • collaborating within a cluster of schools to procure resources
		
		— Sponsorship optional

Maintaining/raising standards	— Freedom to alter length of school day/school term — Freedom from following the national curriculum — Freedom to examine new ways of improving pupil behaviour — Empowerment to raise pupil aspirations — Freedom to introduce new/innovative teaching methods	— Freedom to alter length of school day/school term — Freedom from following the national curriculum — Freedom to engage in extra-curricular/enrichment activities
Partnerships/ collaboration	— Greater opportunities for staff to collaborate with other schools and share good practice (particularly where the school has a chain sponsor) — Opportunities for greater community involvement in the life of the school, eg, through greater use of school facilities	— Opportunity to extend partnership working, particularly where the local authority may have been viewed as inhibiting collaboration in the past — Opportunity to engage in collaboration on the terms of the school rather than the local authority — Financial driver to establish new/ embed existing partnerships to achieve economies of scale (particularly for primary schools)

— Leaders in both sponsored and converting academies were motivated by greater freedom in relation to the curriculum and the school day. However, while for leaders in sponsored academies this provided the opportunity to explore innovation in order to raise standards more rapidly, for leaders in converting academies, the motivation was to have the freedom to continue doing what they already did well, but without the constraints of having to seek permission from the local authority. Leaders of both types of academies recognised that they actually had most of the freedoms they needed prior to becoming an academy but that academy status legitimised, as it were, their sense of empowerment and encouraged them to act in the way they considered best for their school.

— In terms of collaboration with other schools, leaders in sponsored chain academies, in particular, were motivated by achieving greater opportunities for staff to share good practice with other schools in the group. Leaders in academies with single academy sponsorship were less focused on collaboration; rather their primary motivation was to use academy status, in the first instance, to turn around their own school. In contrast, converting academies were motivated by having more control over the nature of collaboration they were involved in, and some were motivated by the opportunity to expand existing partnerships with primary schools, with the aim of exploring the opportunity of establishing a federation.

Within the survey, converting academies (only) were asked what their motivations were for becoming an academy. Table 5.3 highlights the top five reasons cited for wishing to convert to academy status[16]. The findings indicate that for almost nine-tenths (89 per cent) increased funding was a motivating factor for converting[17] and almost the same proportion (86 per cent) suggested that greater control over school finances was a key motivating factor. Other important factors included:

— greater autonomy to make decisions about the curriculum (71 per cent)

— opportunity to improve the quality of services by moving away from local authority provision (57 per cent)

— greater autonomy in relation to staff pay and conditions (39 per cent)

The findings discussed above, particularly those related to financial motives for becoming an academy, are consistent with the findings from most of the case studies undertaken. In particular, many of the senior and middle leaders who participated in the converting academy case studies believed they could secure better value for money as a result of the financial autonomy that academy status provides. For others, recognising the potential issues of funding cuts, academy status was seen as a means of maintaining the provision that had been in

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16 It is important to note the relatively low number of responses to this question as only academy principals/headteachers in academies that had already converted to academy status were asked to respond to this question.

17 A recent survey undertaken by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) in March 2011 broadly supports this finding. It indicated that for 72 per cent of those applying for academy status, the belief that it will help the school financially is a motivating factor. The full press release is available online at: http://www.ascl.org.uk/home/news_results/?l=l&ListItemID=758&ListGroupID=2.

Table 5.3: Top five reasons given by survey respondents for converting to academy status

Motivating factors	Per cent of respondents
Increased funding	89%
Greater control over our school's finances	86%
Greater autonomy to make decisions about the curriculum we teach to pupils	71%
Opportunity to improve the quality of services we require by moving away from local authority provision	57%
Greater autonomy to make decisions in relation to staff pay and conditions	39%

Multiple response question: only headteachers/academy principals in converting academies were asked to respond to this question
Source: PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011. Base: 25

place prior to conversion.

> "I prefer to have the additional money that is kept at the centre in this school. I think we can spend that money more effectively."

<div align="right">Senior leader, converting academy</div>

> "The direction was made clear early on by the head. Funding would be decreased and some jobs would go. Things that the school valued would be at risk. The main motivating factor was [to] preserve what we already had."

<div align="right">Middle leader, converting academy</div>

The conversion journey

Challenges and enablers

One of the aims of the research was to explore schools' experiences of the conversion process (ie, respondents' views on the legal and administrative procedures involved in converting to academy status and the challenges and opportunities that academy status provides). Sponsored academies involved in this research were not invited to comment on their experience of converting to academy status, though some did volunteer their views. However, the PwC (2008) evaluation of the first 27 academies found that for most of these earlier academies, in particular, the process of converting to academy status was particularly disruptive for the school in general, and for the leadership team in particular. This was because of the multiple changes that were taking place, including the involvement of a sponsor, and the subsequent change in governance, the process of managing the move to new or refurbished buildings, and managing the transfer[18] of staff from the predecessor school to the academy.

Table 5.4 highlights the challenges that academies (both sponsored and converting) report experiencing in moving to academy status. These are a summary of some of the main challenges noted by interviewees who participated in the case studies, and apply to many, though not all the academies.

Leaders in sponsored academies faced challenges of a different nature from their counterparts in converting academies. As discussed previously, the primary motivation for obtaining academy status for many leaders in sponsored academies was to raise standards in a school that was failing. With the new freedoms and additional resources that accompanied academy status came enormous pressure to achieve rapid improvement. Therefore, the subsequent challenges for leaders in these academies were of a strategic, operational and organisational nature, and included revisiting the vision and ethos of the school, revising school policies and realigning leadership structures. Each of these was directly linked to pupil outcomes. In comparison, the challenges for leaders in converting academies, with the exception of managing opposing stakeholders,

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18   By TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations

Table 5.4: Challenges in converting to academy status

Sponsored academies	Converting academies
— Challenging staff to recognise previous underperformance to meet expected standards — Revisiting/refining the ethos, vision and values of the academy — Revising school policies to ensure greater coherence in practices (eg, school behaviour) — (Re)aligning leadership structures to achieve better outcomes for pupils — Engaging with parents/carers and the wider community — TUPE of staff from predecessor school to academy	— Managing stakeholders (local authority, teacher unions), some of which were believed to be opposed to their conversion (in the case of local authorities, some schools noted a challenge in getting them to agree the transfer/leases of land) — Volume of administration/paperwork involved in the process — Burden placed on senior and middle leaders (but particularly the bursar/business manager) to complete the conversion process in a relatively short space of time

Table 5.5: The conversion process: enablers

Enablers	Supporting evidence
Previous experience of a change in status	— A number of the schools had a previous change in status (GM, foundation, trust) and were already familiar with the processes involved in changing school status, being their own admissions body, employing their own staff and owning school grounds. This assisted greatly in simplifying the conversion process. "It hasn't made much difference... we were quite different anyway from the other schools and there has not been any changes to the school as yet." Senior leader, converting academy
Inclusive process	— Many interviewees felt that they had been fully included in the process and at the most appropriate points. The process usually involved the headteacher/principal, the governing body, staff, parents, unions and the local authority. Most of the schools engaged in a consultation process, particularly with staff and parents. This gave those most directly affected by the changes an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns they had (eg, in relation to staff pay and conditions). "It was announced that the governing body were intending to [convert to academy status]. We had a staff meeting to discuss the implications and staff were given two weeks to respond to a consultation. As a result of that process, the headteacher and governor called another meeting and discussed the feedback." Middle leader, converting academy
Technical/legal expertise	— Almost all the case study schools pointed to the importance of having appropriate technical/legal expertise to enable the process to run smoothly. "The legal firm gave us confidence." Senior leader, converting academy

were largely administrative and procedural, and were not linked to pupil outcomes.

Senior and middle leaders in converting academies identified some key enablers that had contributed to a smooth transition to academy status (Table 5.5). These included the benefit of having previously experienced a change in status; for example, some schools had been former GM, foundation or trust schools. In addition, it was found to be an inclusive process, and the governors and leaders in converting academies recognised the importance of ensuring that everyone was fully informed throughout. Linked to this, there also appeared to be adequate consultation with staff and parents, and some leaders indicated that at certain points they had slowed or stalled the process until they were sure they had everyone on board. It appears that exercising caution rather than rushing ahead enabled a smooth transition for the majority of converting academies. In addition, most converting academies ensured that they had obtained the relevant legal advice, particularly in relation to the implications for the governing body in terms of trust status.

Support for converting to an academy

Converting academies reported receiving advice and guidance from a number of sources, including external consultants, the DfE, YPLA and the National College. Views on the quality of advice and guidance were mixed, and where a number of interviewees expressed a negative experience, there was a degree of acknowledgement that some organisations were being as helpful as they could have been, given the rapidly evolving nature of the academies programme.

> "The DfE was as helpful as it could be, given that the rules were still being made up during our process and so the official often didn't know the answers."

Senior leader, converting academy

> "Support came from the Department for Education... In September 2010 the honest answer to our questions was that they didn't know."

Member, governing body, converting academy

Survey findings suggest that converting academies agreed that the advice and support provided by the DfE were helpful, with 25 of the 28 headteachers/principals who responded to this question agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. In contrast, 7 of the 20 headteachers who responded to this question believed that advice and support provided by other schools were helpful[19].

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19 The corresponding numbers were 3 of 16 for SSAT and 3 of 19 for the local authority.

The conversion journey

Figure 5.1 illustrates the conversion journey that all prospective academies will typically go through. On average, the DfE expects the process to take three months from registering interest to the opening of the new academy, though many of the case study schools in the sample found this timeline challenging.

Case study 1 sets out the conversion journey for one of the case study primary schools. It includes the motivations for becoming an academy and the school's experience of the conversion process, including the support received.

Case study 2 sets out the conversion journey for one of the secondary school case studies. This school experienced some challenges, mainly of a legal nature, but generally the process was smooth, with numerous opportunities for stakeholders to be involved.

Figure 5.1: Process for converting to an academy

Step 1: Registration

1. Register your interest using the online form.
2. A named contact in the Department for Education (DfE) will work with you through the conversion process.
3. Governing body starts the consultation required by legislation with interested parties (can start later but must be completed before Funding Agreement).

Step 2: Application to convert/pre-approval checks

1. Your governing body and Foundation (if relevant) pass a resolution in favour of academy conversion.
2. Discuss your plans to support another school to raise standards with your named DfE contact.
3. Local authority/governing body start the TUPE process.
4. Secretary of state will be asked to approve your proposal.

Step 3: Achieve funding agreement

1. Finalise governance documents based on DfE model documents provided.
2. Register the Academy Trust with Companies House.
3. Agree leasing arrangements for the school land and buildings.
4. Local authority/governing body complete the TUPE process.
5. Governors complete required consultation with interested parties.
6. Submit the funding agreement to the secretary of state for approval.

Step 4: Pre-opening

1. CRB checks carried out as necessary.
2. Put new financial systems and contracts in place.
3. Complete academy registrations eg with exam bodies.

Step 5: Academy opens

3 months from registration to opening

Case study 1
The process of converting for a primary school

Background

The primary school serves pupils from a mixed socio-economic area. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is approximately 8 per cent, which is below the national average. The school has a total enrolment of c 300 pupils and has 40 staff, 12 of whom are class-based teachers.

Factors that motivated the school to become an academy:

— freedom from local authority control

— freedom to control its own finances and prioritise spending as it considers appropriate

— freedom to expand collaboration and become a trailblazer for innovation in the area

What was the conversion process like?

The headteacher and deputy headteacher commenced the process on the day that the extension of academy freedoms was announced by the coalition government. They both worked full time through the six-week summer holiday in order to progress conversion. The school employed a project management company which had done other academy start-ups and they took on a solicitor. The total cost of conversion was c £15,000.

They discussed the advantages and disadvantages of academy status with the governing body. Governors then delegated responsibility to the headteacher to continue the process. Consultation was extended to teaching staff. Finally, parents were sent a questionnaire. Three parent forums were held, but attendance was low (only 10 families attended). However, a number of parents indicated to the school that they trusted the school to do the right thing. Teacher unions initially appeared to oppose conversion, but after a secret staff ballot voted in favour of conversion, they appeared to alter their stance.

Support received by the school

The school was frequently on the phone to the DfE during the process, but felt that the DfE did not - at that stage - have all the answers, though there was an acceptance that staff were as helpful as they could be, given the evolving nature of programme:

"I attended the SSAT briefing meeting in June, but this wasn't entirely helpful as they were talking about sponsorship, which wouldn't apply to us."

Headteacher

"The DfE was as helpful as it could be."

Deputy headteacher

Case study 2
The process of converting for a secondary school

Background

The school is a co-educational grammar school. It serves a wide geographical area with admissions from more than 50 primary schools. A significant majority of students come from more advantaged social backgrounds and the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. Relatively few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the proportion for whom English is an additional language is low. It was designated a GM school in the 1990s and then became a foundation school. In December 2010 it became an academy.

Factors that motivated the school to become an academy:

— freedoms in relation to the curriculum and being able to make decisions without having to ask permission

— financial autonomy

— more flexibility to employ and contract staff

What was the conversion process like?

The headteacher had discussions with other schools in the area. In addition, the chair of governors is a member of the national grammar school heads association and had appropriate opportunities to discuss the pros and cons of becoming an academy.

The governing body was heavily involved in planning. There were three stages for governors: firstly, they were given a briefing by the headteacher; secondly, analysis of benefits was undertaken and approval given to proceed, and thirdly, there was detailed planning to understand what needed to be done to convert to an academy.

The school engaged in a period of consultation with staff, parents and pupils and this was generally thought to have worked well by senior and middle leaders.

Conversion challenges

The school experienced a number of challenges in converting to academy status, which were eventually resolved. These included:

— issues over land ownership and how it would pass back to the academy trust

— issues relating to the composition of the governing body and pension liabilities

— difficulties managing a diverse range of stakeholders

Summary and discussion

This section of the report discussed the importance of context. Context includes a range of factors such as school phase/type (and previous status such as GM, trust, foundation) and the socio-economic background of pupils. The context of the school prior to conversion is important because it influences a school's motivation for becoming an academy and also its experience(s) of the conversion journey.

Our findings suggest that independence and autonomy are key motivating factors in themselves for both sponsored and converting academies, but for different reasons. For example, financial autonomy and increased levels of funding were of particular importance for converting academies, and they also placed considerable value on being able to use their academy freedom(s) to make their own decisions about the curriculum. In contrast, the main motivation for independence in sponsored academies was to use their independence to help raise standards rapidly.

The challenges in moving to academy status were linked to the motivation for becoming an academy. For sponsored academies, with the new freedoms and additional resources that accompanied academy status, came enormous pressure to achieve rapid improvement. Therefore, the subsequent challenges for leaders in these academies were of a strategic and operational nature, and included revisiting the vision and ethos of the school, revising school policies and realigning leadership structures. Each of these was directly linked to improving pupil outcomes.

In comparison, the challenges for leaders in converting academies, with the exception of managing opposing stakeholders, were largely administrative and procedural, and were not linked to pupil outcomes. The administrative nature of the process for converting academies suggests that academy status for these schools was being viewed as an opportunity to gain or, in the case of former GM schools, regain autonomy from their local authority rather than an opportunity to do things radically differently. This is in contrast to most sponsored academies that, because of their unique context, had used the additional resources and longer lead-in time to rethink their vision, values and ethos and to realign their leadership structures in order to achieve their aims.

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6. Sponsorship, governance and the local authority

The main difference between sponsored and converting academies is the involvement of a sponsor.

Conversion to academy status has implications for governance in all academies. Academy status brings changes for the school in terms of its relationship with the local authority.

By examining these issues, the challenges and opportunities for leadership in terms of managing different types of academy can be better understood.

This section is structured under the following headings:

— Introduction

— Sponsorship

— Governance

— Relationship with the local authority

— Collaboration with other schools

— Summary and discussion

Introduction

Converting to academy status has implications for school management and in this regard, sponsorship, governance and the relationship with the local authority are important contextual factors. There will be changes in terms of governance for all schools that convert to academy status; however these changes will be particularly significant if there is a sponsor involved. In addition, academy status signals a new relationship with the local authority for all academies and, in turn, being independent of the local authority will affect the nature and degree of collaboration with other schools. Subsequently, the skills required by leaders to navigate these changes may take on a new dimension.

This section of the report presents the findings in relation to the influence and impact of sponsorship, as well as the views of converting academies about sponsorship. It then goes on to discuss the impact of academy status on governance, the relationship with the local authority and collaboration with other schools.
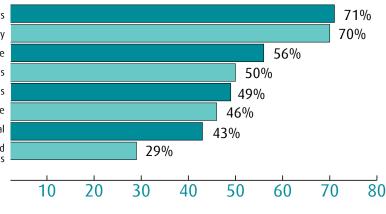
Sponsorship

The majority of sponsored academies visited had sponsors with previous educational experience. There was strong support for the contribution of the sponsor in terms of educational outcomes, and clear recognition that the sponsor's educational expertise was key to creating and establishing a new vision and ethos, and to changing the direction of the school. This was confirmed by the survey data.

Respondents in sponsored academies were asked to identify which features of sponsorship were positively contributing to their school. The findings are presented in Figure 6.1. The data suggests that the areas where sponsorship added most value related to providing access to new networks (71 per cent) and contributing to the ethos and values of the academy (70 per cent). Respondents' views were more mixed in relation to the positive impact of sponsorship on sharing their knowledge (46 per cent), setting strategic goals (49 per cent) and challenging performance (56 per cent).

Figure 6.1: Positive impacts of sponsorship

Category	%
Sponsor providing us with access to new network/contacts	71%
Sponsor contributing to the ethos and values of the academy	70%
Challenging performance	56%
Sponsor providing resources	50%
Setting strategic goals	49%
Sponsor sharing their knowledge	46%
Appraising the performance of the principal	43%
Sponsor contributing to achieving stability and consistency in standards	29%

% of respondents (Base 167)

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010

McKinsey & Co (2010)[20] found that almost all principals believed that setting the vision and direction of the school is one of the biggest contributors to success and it is interesting that this was noted as one of the most positive impacts of the sponsor(s). In terms of the impact of sponsorship on challenging performance, as the NAO (2010) and other research suggests, most academies are achieving increases in academic attainment for their pupils compared with their predecessor schools; however, as noted earlier, it is not possible to disaggregate the primary contributory factor, and it is likely that a range of individual and collective academy features, including the sponsor, are working together to raise standards.

A variety of sponsorship models existed in the sponsored academies that participated in the case studies including single, joint and chain/multiple sponsorship models. The findings from the case studies are consistent with the above findings in that we found that sponsors generally play a key role in helping academies to develop the mission, ethos, vision and values of the school. Case study 3 highlights the importance that sponsorship played in one of the sponsored academies we visited.
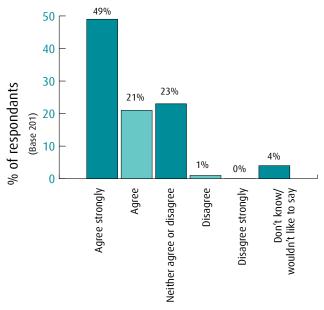
Case study 3 illustrates a more general point in relation to the contribution of sponsors, namely that the general consensus among sponsored academies was that sponsors with educational expertise were desirable as they would contribute positively to raising standards in the school. PwC (2008) found that having a sponsor with previous educational experience was positive in terms of its contribution to raising standards.

A key question for the research related to what the implications of not having an academy sponsor

would be for converting academies. Figure 6.2 shows that the key finding to come out of the survey of converting academies is that the majority of leaders (70 per cent) in these academies agreed or strongly agreed that it is a good thing that schools converting to academy status from 2010 onwards are not required to have a sponsor, whilst almost a quarter had no opinion either way. Key reasons cited by respondents for not wishing to have a sponsor included: a desire to maintain their independence, freedom and autonomy (31 per cent), and a sizeable proportion (20 per cent) who could not identify a rationale for having a sponsor.

Figure 6.2: Extent to which converting academy respondents agree that not being required to have a sponsor is a good thing

Response	% of respondents (Base 201)
Agree strongly	49%
Agree	21%
Neither agree or disagree	23%
Disagree	1%
Disagree strongly	0%
Don't know/wouldn't like to say	4%

Source: PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011.
Totals do not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding

20 The survey McKinsey & Co undertook was of school principals across eight high-performing systems around the world.

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Case study 3
Sponsorship and its value to a sponsored academy

Background

This school was formed from the amalgamation of two predecessor schools. The pupils who attend the school are less affluent than pupils who attend other schools in the local authority. Before the school became an academy, the attainment of each of the schools was very low by national standards – 23 per cent of pupils in one of the predecessor schools achieved five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, and an even lower proportion (11 per cent) in the other predecessor school achieved this standard.

Sponsorship model

The school operates a joint sponsorship model. The lead sponsor is a university and the other sponsor is its local authority. The school began working with the lead sponsor approximately nine months before the academy opened and has a very positive relationship with it.

The background of sponsors matters

The school noted the importance of working with a sponsor that had an interest and background in education-related matters. It was also suggested that having a strong relationship with the sponsor was fundamental to the school's progress:

"Values are absolutely fundamental and central to who we are and what we are about – when I was looking at which academy I would like to be involved in working with, a university [sponsor] was more attractive to me... the sponsor was very important for me."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"I think the relationship with sponsors is the fundamental difference – when I was a head in a maintained school I was the boss and governors were very much directed by my guidance and advice and [it was] really very light touch. I feel very much in [this] academy that it is the sponsor's school and I am a leader working on their behalf."

Headteacher, sponsored academy

There are a number of specific benefits that sponsorship brings to this school, including:

"educational expertise: Both sponsors add value, but more so [the university]... they've brought a lot with them."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

"sharing their knowledge and skills: [We] developed a communications strategy with external consultants about tone of communication and working with stakeholders. [This is something] our sponsor is passionate about."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"a network of contacts: I do training with the sponsor, talk at conferences with sponsors. We do lots of things together... they are well connected."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

The evidence from sponsored academies appears to suggest that they are largely indifferent in relation to whether schools converting under the new arrangements should have a sponsor – over two-fifths (44 per cent) did not have an opinion either way and almost one-third (32 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Just over one-fifth (21 per cent) felt it is important for converting academies to have a sponsor.

The findings from converting academy case studies suggest that whilst some leaders were open to the idea of sponsorship, they had specific criteria for working in partnership with a sponsor. Some schools indicated that whilst it might be good if a prospective sponsor has an educational background, the sponsor should be willing to delegate authority for decision-making and the strategic direction of the school to senior and middle leaders. Therefore, there was no desire for a prospective sponsor to change the vision or ethos of the school, rather their key contribution was to add value in other, more tangible ways so that the school could continue to do what it was already doing very well.

Converting academy views on sponsorship

"[Sponsored] academies would welcome sponsor relationship for different reasons [from us], for example management support, whereas here any sponsorship would have to be more academic [ie, a university sponsor]."

Member, governing body, converting academy

"It would depend on what the sponsor would bring, but the overall direction of the school should remain with the staff and governors."

Senior leader, converting academy

"It would not be something we would rule out. The issue would be the relationship between governing body, head and the sponsor – you hear about phase one academies where sponsors were very interventionist and that would be unacceptable."

Senior leader, converting academy

Governance

In the sponsored academies that took part in the case studies, all the sponsors played a key role in the governing body and, since the school had become an academy, the governance structure had been radically changed. As illustrated above, governors played a key role in both setting and communicating the new vision and ethos of the school. In addition, governors tended to have a greater array of skills and experiences upon which to draw, and these were strongly linked to the experience and expertise of the sponsor. The general consensus was that the sponsor and governors played a key role in terms of support and challenge and leaders reported experiencing a higher degree of scrutiny than they might have previously experienced.

Governance in sponsored academies

"[In the predecessor school, we] didn't feel supported and the school was failing. Now we are questioned, [and the governing body is] very much the devil's advocate, [but they are] very supportive."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"The committee is focused very much on things happening on the ground in the academy – they are involved in the life of the school. For example, there is a member that focuses on literacy and another on our specialism. Committee and trust members are involved in making staff appointments."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"[There] is a very high level of expectation, much higher than anything else I've experienced."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"All [the] governors are fantastic... one has specialism in education, one in public relations. Also specialist in procurement, [Investors in People] and environment and sustainability issues."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

Governance within chains of sponsored academies varied. As identified by PwC (2008), governance operates at two levels in these academies, central and local. Central governance generally focuses on strategic and overall financial and performance issues, and governance at the local level (ie, the level of the individual academy) focuses on more operational issues. This is illustrated in Case study 4.

Case study 4
Governance in operation in a chain academy

Background

This sponsored academy operates as part of a chain. The chain includes four academies within the trust. The overarching trust has formal responsibility for all the academies in the chain.

Structure and function of governance at a central level

There are 15 trustees, some from a business background including the chair. Several trustees are parent and local authority representatives. This body exercises the functions that in other governing bodies may be associated with the finance committee, the audit committee and the staffing committee. The executive committee (which includes all the trustees) has a strategic function for the whole federation.

> "Every fortnight the chief executive, the finance director, the development co-ordinator, the heads of the four academies and the chair and vice chairs meet as an executive committee. They have formal papers which are considered and it has the power to make delegated decisions in certain areas and the DfE is advised of decisions where appropriate."

> Senior leader, sponsored academy

> "Attendance at the executive committee is optional for academy heads but we go because it is where the strategy for the whole federation is decided along with key financial decisions."

> Senior leader, sponsored academy

Structure and function of governance at a local level

Each academy has its own local committee, which comprise a number of governors who transferred from the predecessor school. Although these committees have no formal powers they focus on issues affecting each academy. Respondents indicated that the local committees are listened to and taken seriously.

> "There are 20 members on the committee for the academy – some of them transferred over from being governors of the predecessor schools. Some committee members also sit on the overarching trust board. The committee is focused very much on things happening on the ground in the academy – they are involved in the life of the school. For example, there is a member that focuses on literacy and another on our specialism. Committee and trust members are involved in making staff appointments."

> Senior leader, sponsored academy

In contrast to sponsored academies, the evidence from the case study visits to converting academies suggests there was little change in the composition or structure of the governing body, apart from those changes that are required to meet the necessary legal obligations. In part this may be because the focus for converters during the conversion process was on achieving academy status with schools simply establishing standard governance models that are, however, open to variation and that will enable schools to review and vary their governance arrangements as they start to operate in an academy environment.

However, the survey data suggests that primary converting academies may be more likely to use their academy status to introduce new forms of governance. Some 46 per cent of primary converting academies indicated that, where possible, they would use academy independence to introduce new forms of governance, compared with 34 per cent of secondary converting academies. In addition, whilst the case study data suggested that converting academies had no plans to change their governance structures, there was an acknowledgement that governance was now more flexible and allowed for co-option in the future. In addition, some governors acknowledged increased accountability.

Whilst academies that convert under the new arrangements are not required to have sponsorship arrangements in place, converting academies are required to establish an academy trust (which is a charitable company registered with Companies House). Directors are appointed to the trust and usually include a number of the existing school's governing body, but overall management of the school normally resides with the governing body rather than with the academy trust.

In terms of the implications for the role of governors in converting academies, the case study visits suggested that since converting to academy status and experiencing reduced involvement of the local authority, governors are expected to take on more responsibility (eg, for buildings and other assets). One governor explained this as "the buck now stops with us".

In contrast to the skills of governors in the predecessor schools of the sponsored academies (prior to the involvement of the sponsor), the skill set of governors in converting academies was already well developed and wide ranging. Indeed, the majority of governing bodies included individuals with educational and other professional expertise. However, some governors and leaders in converting academies suggested that there may be a need for additional training, in particular relating to the new responsibilities and accountabilities that academy status brings.

Skills of governors in converting academies

"The governors are active and visible and each member of the governing body brings their own skills and attributes... we have some with financial and business enterprise skills... there is normally someone on the governing body who has the necessary skills... they are very active."

Middle leader, converting academy

"The governing body is now running a small organisation. The school took advice on risks which are perceived to be different, but not more serious."

Senior leader, converting academy

Finally, some converting academies were previously trust schools and their governance included external partners. Consultation with converting academies, and evidence from stakeholder consultations, suggest that some academies have included these previous partners in their new academy governance structures. It is important to note that these external partners are not seen as, nor do they perform the role of, a traditional sponsor[21]. In addition, the data from stakeholder consultations suggests that as the programme develops, some sponsored academies may move towards developing partnerships with outstanding converting academies in order to draw on their expertise, and to enable them to work more effectively with underperforming schools. This will have implications for sponsorship and governance models and structures.

Relationship with the local authority

With the extension of academy freedoms to schools, it is inevitable that the relationship between academies (whether sponsored or converting) and their respective local authority will change. One would expect the relationship to get weaker, given that many of the functions undertaken by the local authority will become the responsibility of the academy itself or of the YPLA. In addition, academies, particularly those that are part of a chain, would be expected to procure fewer services

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21 This arrangement is not typical among this group of academies. However, no centrally held data is available to quantify the number of converting academies that have these arrangements in place.

from the local authority given that many have their own capacity to provide the services they need.

In relation to sponsored academies, Figure 6.3 shows that for almost one-half (48 per cent) of those surveyed indicated that their relationship with their local authority had become weaker since they became an academy. Just over one-fifth (22 per cent) indicated that it had remained the same, whilst just over one-tenth (11 per cent) suggested that it had become stronger.

The findings presented above suggest that the local authority has become less important in the life of sponsored academies. This is consistent with the findings from the case studies with sponsored academies. These suggest that the relationship with the local authority is, for the most part, light touch, although in the majority of cases the relationship is perceived to be positive (particularly where the local authority is a sponsor or was instrumental in the creation of the academy).

Notwithstanding this, there are existing challenges between sponsored academies and local authorities. These relate to, for example, the cost of buying in or buying back services previously provided by the local authority. These issues tend to be exacerbated where the quality of the relationship between the local authority and academies was viewed to be poor prior to taking on academy status.

Relationship between sponsored academies and the local authority
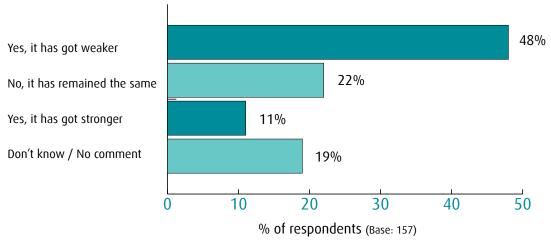
"The local authority is one of our sponsors. [It is] very much hands-on and part of our development from the start. We had people from the local authority come in and discuss things with us and they helped us develop our mission statement."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

"What [the local authority] charges schools is very different from what it charges academies, so there is an unfair playing field there. So you are forced to look for alternatives."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

The survey findings from sponsored academies suggest there is a continuing role for local authorities in their area. Just under four-fifths (78 per cent) of survey respondents believed that their local authority should have some degree of engagement with their academy.

Figure 6.3: Relationship between sponsored academies and their local authority since they became an academy

% of respondents (Base: 157)

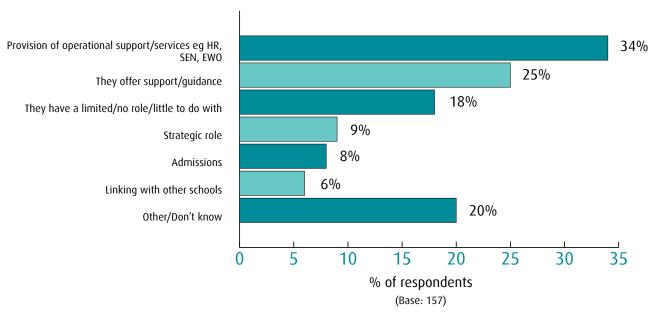Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010

The most commonly cited response related to the provision of support and guidance (mentioned by over one-third of respondents (34 per cent)), followed by almost one-quarter (24 per cent) of respondents who believed their local authority should have a role in the co-ordination of admissions. Other areas of support cited were:

— partnership/sponsorship of the academy (13 per cent)

— provision of operational support/services, including special educational needs/HR/ education welfare services (9 per cent)

— strategic role (9 per cent)

Case study 5 illustrates how independence has resulted in a shift in the balance of power between the local authority and sponsored academies, with the local authorities having to compete with other providers in the marketplace.

The survey data for converting academies suggest a mixed view in terms of whether the relationship with the local authority has changed, with 41 per cent of respondents indicating that it had remained the same and 33 per cent suggesting it had become weaker. A very small percentage of respondents (3 per cent) indicated that the relationship had become stronger. It is important to note, however, that many of these academies have only recently converted and that over time their relationship with the local authority may change as they make an increasing number of decisions about how they buy in services and from whom.

Respondents were also asked to comment on the role of the local authority in relation to academies. A total of 77 per cent of coded responses to an open-ended question indicated that the local authority should have some type of involvement. As Figure 6.4 indicates, the most frequent response related to the provision of operational support/services, eg HR, special educational needs (SEN) and education welfare officer (EWO), with 34 per cent indicating that local authorities did still have a role in providing these services to academies. This was followed by offering support and guidance, with 25 per cent of respondents indicating that they saw this as the role of the local authority. The research indicated that 18 per cent of respondents saw a limited role for the local authority or that they had little to do with the local authority.

The relationship with the local authority was also explored with converting academies that participated in the case studies. The data from these schools indicates that the quality of the relationship between schools and the local authority prior to conversion was variable, ranging from very challenging (for approximately one-half of schools visited) to good. However, for all converting academies, the nature of the relationship was generally considered to be more distant since converting, particularly for schools that previously had GM status (5 out of 10 case study schools). Linked to this, the findings suggest that schools with former GM status may be an indicator of the type of school that opts to convert more quickly under the new arrangements.

Figure 6.4: Converting academies' views on future role of their local authority

(Base: 157)

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2011
Note: This was a multiple-response question, therefore, totals will sum to more than 100 per cent.

Case study 5
Building new relationships with local authorities: the experience of a sponsored academy

Background

The academy opened in September 2009 in the buildings of its predecessor school. The academy is smaller than average and the number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average (at approximately 22 per cent). The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average although the proportion of students whose first language is not English is in line with national figures.

The proportion of students registered by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national figure, although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.

Using independence to build positive relationships built on mutual trust

The academy has chosen to buy in services from the local authority that are considered good value for money. This includes: HR; legal; payroll; educational welfare; some grounds maintenance, and Connexions/careers advice.

There are several services that it no longer buys in, for example financial services. Academy interviewees suggested that that the local authority felt a bit put out that the academy had decided not to buy this service from it. However, the benefit for the academy is the freedom to achieve better value for money, and to purchase services that are specifically suited to the needs of the school.

"We shop around… we buy back [our services] separately from different places."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

"If anything, it has freed us up to do what we need to do rather than waste our time."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

There is minimal involvement from the local authority in the day-to-day running of the school. The nature of the relationship with the local authority is more businesslike, and the quality of the relationship has improved over time.

"I'd say that we have a good relationship, but they don't interfere."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

Relationship between converting academies and the local authority

"We can just get on with things on a day-to-day basis without having to deal with the local authority and that is a big step forward for us."

Senior leader, converting academy

"The local authority overlooked, undervalued and blocked us."

Senior leader, converting academy

"There are some services which were really useful and I suspect we will [continue to] purchase... the future role for [the] local authority [is] slimmer and more focused and [it] will have to offer true value for money and this will be a challenge for [it]."

Senior leader, converting academy

Therefore, notwithstanding the desire for less involvement by the local authority and an expressed desire to go it alone by leaders in these academies, many do continue to buy in at least some of the services previously provided by their local authority, including HR, SEN, educational welfare services and insurance. However, a number of case study schools noted that whilst some of the services were of high quality, they felt that since becoming an academy, costs for the services provided by the local authority had increased so much that they were no longer seen as good value for money.

Collaboration with other schools

Collaboration between sponsored academies and other schools is largely dependent on the governance and sponsorship model in place. For example, for academies that were part of a chain (ie, where there was multiple academy sponsorship), collaboration arrangements with other schools in the chain appears to be strong.

Overall, the case study data suggests that collaboration arrangements between sponsored academies were stronger with feeder primary schools and, apart from where there was an established relationship with a particular school, collaboration was less well developed with secondary schools.

Collaboration between sponsored academies and other schools

"In our first year we did this to a limited extent... primary schools are our first port of call...we host an event every second term. So we created that kind of relationship and do academy learning days for primary schools."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

Figure 6.5: Type and number of schools that converting academies are collaborating with

Base: 100-205
Source: PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011

> "Because we are within a foundation we network with our sister schools. I'm surprised that other schools don't want to come in and ask how we are doing it. I'd be in like a shot and I've visited other schools."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy

> "We don't really do a lot of networking... I try and get out to heads of English departments within the local authority... I have a day coming up for staff to go out to another school soon."
>
> Middle leader, sponsored academy

It might have been expected that many of the converting academies, due to their track record of high performance, would already have had arrangements in place to collaborate and support other schools nationally (eg, as an NSS). The survey data indicates that less than one-third of respondents worked in a school that was being led by an NLE.

In terms of the impact of academy status on the ability of the school to perform this role, the majority of respondents indicated that this would not have a negative impact.

More generally, in terms of the number of collaborative arrangements in place with both primary and secondary schools, the survey data indicates that one-half of converting academies had no collaborative arrangements in place with primary schools and over one-quarter (26 per cent) of respondents had no collaborative arrangements in place with secondary schools. However, a relatively high proportion (28 per cent) indicated they collaborated with 4 or more secondary schools, and similarly around one-quarter indicated they collaborated with 4 or more primary schools.

The quality of the relationships that have been established is perhaps more significant than the number of collaborative relationships in place. This research did not explore the quality of the relationship with the schools that academies collaborated with. However, in this regard, the findings from PwC (2009) from a study with high-performing specialist (HPS) schools (none of which were academies but most of which were outstanding) found that collaboration between HPS schools and other primary schools tended to be deeper than with the secondary schools they partnered.

The findings from the converting academy case studies suggest that most academies had not changed the nature or degree of collaboration since converting to academy status. However, interviewees indicated that academy status would provide them with the freedom to engage in collaboration with other schools in a way that is more beneficial for their school, and for the schools with which they collaborate. A number of interviewees indicated that the academy did have plans to expand collaboration with other schools and most interviewees were keen not to send out a message that they saw academy status as an opportunity to go it alone.

Collaboration between converting academies and other schools

> "We shall be better able to do NLE work. We are now part of a club that talks the same language."
>
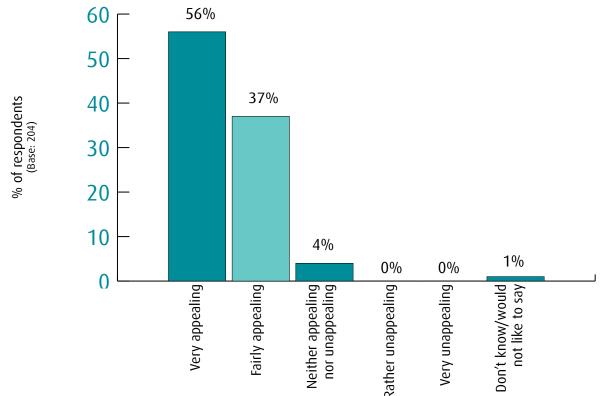> Senior leader, converting academy

> "I expect to see us doing more collaboration; it is a specific requirement and secondly we are keen to alleviate any perception that we are going to be on our own and we want to show that we are not abandoning the rest of the county."
>
> Member, governing body, converting academy

Hargreaves (2010) talks about new forms of school-based leadership development being a rich breeding ground for future system leaders. In this regard, he includes those in key roles in teaching schools. The survey explored the level of interest among converting academies in relation to becoming a teaching school[22] (which would involve a significant degree of collaboration in terms of providing support and training to other schools). Figure 6.6 illustrates that there is considerable interest in this policy initiative among converting academies. This may be significant in terms of providing an opportunity to draw more outstanding schools into providing school improvement and leadership development support on a systematic basis.

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22 It is important to note that converting academies that wish to be designated a teaching school will need to meet specific criteria namely, an Ofsted grade of 'outstanding' for teaching and learning, and leadership and management. They will also need to demonstrate evidence of a longstanding commitment to partnership working.

Figure 6.6: Extent to which converting academies find the teaching schools concept appealing

Source: PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011

Summary and discussion

Sponsored academies were generally of the view that sponsors add value in many ways. In contrast, the consensus among converting academies involved in the case studies was that, whilst it might be desirable for a sponsor to have some previous educational experience, they would also have to offer more tangible contributions, such as additional resources or finance. Moreover, leaders in converting academies were generally averse to sponsors who may, from their perspective, interfere in the day-to-day running of the school. However, the views of leaders in converting academies may reflect a lack of understanding of how sponsorship works in practice.

In the sponsored academies visited, it was evident that all the sponsors played a key role in the governing body. In addition, since becoming an academy, the governance structure had radically changed. As identified by PwC, and as described in the literature review, there were two models of governance operating in sponsored academies. Chain academies involved two tiers of governance, with a central governing body that took ultimate responsibility for decision-making within the chain, as well as a local governing body that operated at the level of the individual academy. Governors,

under the direction of the sponsor, had also played a key role in both setting and communicating the new vision and ethos of the school. The sponsor and governors played a key role in terms of support and challenge and leaders reported experiencing a high degree of scrutiny.

In contrast, the evidence from the case study visits to converting academies suggests there had been little change in the composition or structure of the governing body, apart from those changes that were required to meet legal obligations. In contrast to the skills of governors in the predecessor schools of sponsored academies (prior to the involvement of the sponsor), the skill set of governors in converting academies was already well developed and wide ranging. Indeed, the majority of governing bodies were reported to include individuals with a high level of educational and other professional expertise

Consultation with academies that converted from Trust school status indicated that they have continued to include some or all of their external Trust partners in the new academy governance arrangements.

Both sponsored and converting academies indicated that there was still a role for the local authority in relation to academies, although this was primarily as a service provider (though with sponsored

academies local authorities were still sometimes providing or resourcing improvement support). However, for sponsored academies there had been a shift in the balance of power, with the local authority now having to compete with other providers in the marketplace for their business. This shift in power was less evident for converting academies, many of which already had a more distant relationship with the local authority prior to achieving academy status. It was noted that as both sponsored and converting academies became more efficient in sourcing alternative providers of services, the role of the local authority as a service provider may decrease further, and it may take on a more strategic role (eg, in relation to pupil admissions).

The findings would suggest that collaborative arrangements between academies and other schools – whether sponsored or converting – varied according to whether they were part of a federation or a chain, the history of relations with other schools, whether they were an NSS, and links with the local authority. It is not yet clear what impact academy status will have on the nature and extent of collaboration in converting academies. However, the fact that 93 per cent of survey respondents in converting academies were interested in becoming a teaching school suggests that this new policy initiative may help to improve collaboration between converting academies in particular, and other schools.This section of the report sets out the findings from our research relating to leadership in academies.

7. Leading an academy

The purpose of this section is to discuss if, and how, leading an academy (whether sponsored or converting) is different or similar to leading in a non-academy setting and the implications of this for the training and development of academy leaders.

This section is structured under the following headings:

— Introduction

— Strategic leadership

— Organisational leadership

— Operational leadership

— Leadership development

— Summary and discussion

Introduction

An independent study on school leadership carried out by PwC (2007a) provides evidence from the literature that good leadership and management lead to good teaching and learning, and that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in terms of its impact on student learning.

> 'As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation.'
>
> Leithwood et al, 2006:5

The overall aim of this section is to present the findings from the research with leaders of sponsored and converting academies in relation to each aspect of leadership. Many of the attributes and skills that school leaders in general need along with the strategies and structures they employ are similar to, and overlap with, those found in the academy sector. However, this section explores what is distinctive about leading these two types of academies, and what academy status means for leadership.

Strategic leadership

McKinsey & Co (2010) found that school leadership is crucial to outcomes and that it has grown in importance over the past decade: one of the key revelations over the past 10 years is that school leadership is not just an HR issue, it is a strategic issue. Setting the vision and strategic direction of an academy is critical to securing long-term and sustainable improvements in pupil achievement and attainment.

As indicated earlier, the principal and, where applicable, the academy sponsor both have a key role to play in helping to shape their academy's vision and values. The surveys invited senior and middle leaders to state what their vision and core values were. The most commonly cited responses indicated that pupils are at the heart of their school's vision, and included the following:

— for every child to achieve, meet high standards and fulfil their potential

— personal development of pupils

— to raise attainment and achievement

— to be a high-quality education provider

The case studies with sponsored academies indicated that, in keeping with their motivations for becoming an academy, significant investment had been made in raising the aspirations and ambitions of pupils and their communities (where there had

previously been low aspirations). Consequently, there was a strong desire among interviewees that academy freedoms would be used to put in place appropriate structures and systems to enable the new vision to be achieved and owned.

Sponsored academies use of freedoms to raise aspirations and ambitions of pupils

"It was that core belief for social justice and respect that came... so whatever the children had experienced or wherever they were coming from, [our staff]... would understand and you can feel this as soon as you walk into the academy."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"Values are absolutely fundamental and central to who we are and what we are about – when I was looking at which academy I would like to be involved in working with... I wanted to work somewhere challenging."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"Overall it is to create an outstanding all-ability community school... to do that is about having high expectations and high aspirations for youngsters – believing that their background and abilities will not hinder them from achieving. Previously the school believed that they couldn't achieve; they were on SEN and behaviour registers and therefore, that is the view that they had of themselves."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

In contrast to the above, converting academies already had a strong vision in place, prior to becoming an academy. This was very much rooted in being centres of excellence, and in pushing their students to be the best. Therefore, converting academies were focused on using academy freedoms to continue to do what they were already doing very well. Consequently, the majority of converting academies involved in the case studies had no plans to change either their vision or ethos.

Impact of conversion on vision and values of converting academies

"We want to push our students to compete with the best of the best in life."

Senior leader, converting academy

"All our values have carried through to the academy. Our practices are outstanding and we are determined to maintain the good things. Academy status presents the opportunity for growth with continuity."

Senior leader, converting academy

"We hope to continue with the same values."

Survey respondent, converting academy

"The aim and values of the school remain unchanged in the conversion to an academy."

Survey respondent, converting academy

All schools will experience challenges in achieving their school's vision. The important point to note in relation to this study is that the nature of these challenges is linked to the context of the school. The survey data points to a distinct difference between converting academies and sponsored academies in terms of the most frequently identified leadership challenge. In contrast to sponsored academies, where the majority of respondents identified raising pupil attainment as their top challenge, the top challenge identified by the majority of respondents in converting academies was funding and financial resources.

For converting academies the challenge of funding and financial resources reflects their desire and motivation for greater financial autonomy. Linked to this, the second most frequently identified challenge for converting academies was buying in support services. Notably, this was a bigger challenge for primary converting academies, where 56 per cent of respondents identified this challenge, making this the second most important challenge for primary converting academies. This may be explained, in part, by the size of the school, which would have implications for achieving economies of scale, and the fact that, unlike secondary converting academies, very few primary academies had had any experience of operating independently of the local authority.

The challenges identified in the sponsored academies survey were broadly similar to those

identified in the case studies. Leaders recognised that one of the challenges they face in achieving their vision is to implement effective strategies to address the needs of both pupils and staff.

Leadership challenges in relation to staff and pupils in sponsored academies

The challenge of balancing inclusion and standards

"Really it is about balancing inclusion and standards – we need to support children with their multitude of differences but we also have to raise standards."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"Because certain students have been excluded previously it was a challenge, but because rules and boundaries are different for us it works better for us as a school... challenges for us are we are in a poor area and we have some very challenging parents and students. Sometimes it is what primary school has not done that we then have to implement, that is a challenge."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

The challenge of balancing professional growth and accountability

"Teachers have found it tough to feel successful when we are demanding ever higher standards, so we do lots of regular reviews and observations but we absolutely want teachers to feel proud of what they achieve. I hope that people like the approach to leadership."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"There is a lot more pressure. There is a lot more accountability and you need to be driving things and be more involved. So it is trying to find the balance. Academies lead towards more accountability which does equal more pressure."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

Respondents were also asked to identify their need for leadership support. As Table 7.1 shows, respondents in both converting and sponsored academies identified leadership development as one of the top three areas needing support. In addition, support in relation to networking and collaboration was the third most frequently identified area for support for respondents in both types of academies, which may reflect an acknowledgement by leaders of the responsibilities that academies have in this regard as well as the benefits that can be derived from networking and collaboration.

Table 7.1: Leadership challenges impacting on academy leaders, and areas identified for greater leadership support

Academy type	Leadership challenges (top three)	Leadership support (top three)
Sponsored	Raising pupil attainment (68 per cent)	Leadership development (79 per cent)
	Pupils' background and/or interest in learning (54 per cent)	Leadership of teaching and learning (71 per cent)
	Quality of teaching staff (43 per cent)	Networking and collaboration (68 per cent)
Converting	Funding and financial resources (65 per cent)	Financial management (69 per cent)
	Buying in support services (33 per cent)	Leadership development (56 per cent)
	Raising pupil attainment (31 per cent)	Networking and collaboration (52 per cent)

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011
Base for sponsored academies: 199
Base for converting academies: 160

For sponsored academies, the top two areas identified were leadership development and leadership of teaching and learning. These areas of support are consistent with the top three challenges identified by these academies. The most frequently identified area in terms of support for respondents in converting academies related to financial management, which is also consistent with the most frequently identified leadership challenge for these academies, which was funding and financial resources.

Organisational leadership

Our research suggests that, compared with their predecessor schools, sponsored academies have a distinctive business-like feel. The majority of interviewees in the case study visits believed that their academy was run like a business, with more defined roles, and more responsibilities and accountability mechanisms than maintained schools. In addition, the language used by interviewees in some academies depicted the pupil as a client (or service user) rather than as a receiver of services.

A business like approach to leadership in sponsored academies

"There is much more focus on schools as independent businesses."

National stakeholder

"Sometimes I think the most effective academies see themselves as delivering to clients and see students as clients... Those academies are tasting success... they have to put students at the heart of their plans."

National stakeholder

"As middle leaders we are more accountable and this transfers to the teachers down the line. What happens is that they are then driven to perform better... it is making sure we are more accountable to the student as a client... [that] we feel more accountable to them and we put more thought into the process of how you teach and what you are doing in order to achieve the end outcome, ie, results."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

The literature suggests that sponsored academies have generally been successful in using their freedoms to distribute responsibilities (and accountabilities) in a different way to their predecessor school, particularly in relation to the role of middle leaders. Although senior leadership in sponsored academies has generally been initially very directive in order to drive school improvement, it has also been accompanied by giving middle leaders greater responsibility and accountability for teaching and learning strategies, either on a faculty or year group basis. Sponsored academy trusts that incorporate more than one school are also able to develop leaner senior leadership structures due to leadership responsibilities operating across the group or between phases, as is the case, for example, in all through academies. Both these factors are illustrated in Case study 6.

In general, the research (PwC, 2007a) suggests that leadership structures in converting academies were more traditional (ie, typically a headteacher supported by one or more deputy heads and assistant heads with a number of middle leaders working together in a single school and generally including a degree of distributed leadership). It is important to note that there were exceptions to this. One converting academy provided an example of system leadership where the headteacher was a national leader of education and the school part of a wider cluster.

Case study 6
Distributed leadership in a sponsored academy

Background

This school is a non-selective all-through 3-19 academy that opened in September 2009 incorporating a secondary school, a junior school and a nursery and infant school. The socio-economic context of the school is that it serves an area of high deprivation and is in the bottom quartile of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). Almost two-fifths of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has a large number of pupils who are of Black or minority ethnic heritage. Over 40 per cent of students have English as an additional language (EAL).

The leadership structure

The academy has a leaner senior leadership structure than would be the case if each school had its own senior leadership team. A number of the leadership responsibilities operate across the phases (for example, teaching and learning, and inclusion and access). The senior leadership structure covering all three schools consists of:

— principal of whole school

— vice principal, responsible for the primary schools

— assistant principal for the primary schools

— vice principal, responsible for 11-14

— vice principal, responsible for 14-16

— four other assistant principals

In addition, the school also has a middle leadership structure, which includes:

— leaders of learning zones (maths, science, English, performing arts etc)

— a house structure which is pastoral and vertical

— progress leaders, supported by pastoral leaders and based on year groups

— curriculum leaders

Middle leaders feel increasingly empowered due to a more distributed leadership model.

"Last year was quite firm which was what was needed and this year I have noticed a change to distributed leadership and collegial style with working groups and a staff input into ideas. I have got roles that have been distributed to me."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

"There is also [more] distributed leadership for me personally which I quite enjoy. I have taken on a few more senior roles this year: that's been good for me. I feel confident in moving on to the next level of leadership and that's my aim for the next year."

Middle leader, sponsored academy

Figure 7.1 illustrates that the leadership structure had stayed the same in a high percentage of converting academies (86 per cent agreed or strongly agreed)[23]. Many of the senior and middle leaders in converting academies indicated that they had not changed their leadership structure as this had served them well in the past and, they believed, had helped the school to achieve an Ofsted rating of outstanding. However, almost two-thirds of headteachers indicated that they could see the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders changing quite a lot in the next three to five years, particularly in relation to the headteacher and the finance/business manager/bursar. Therefore, as with sponsored academies, some converting academies may use their academy status to change the leadership model and a wider range of leadership models/structures may emerge within these academies as the programme develops.

The case study visits are consistent with these data, and suggest that the expected changes in leadership roles are linked to increased financial autonomy and associated responsibility. Whilst there may be some expected changes in relation to the roles of leaders, the case study visits also confirmed that these schools have established leadership structures that have worked well for them in the past. Almost all of the interviewees spoken to indicated that they had few, if any, plans to use their academy status to change the structure of leadership in their school.

However, it is important to note that those spoken to as part of the consultation events suggested that they did not have sufficient lead-in time to rethink their leadership structures to have greater impact on standards.

Impact of conversion on leadership structures

"There's no need to change the structure. If it ain't broke…"
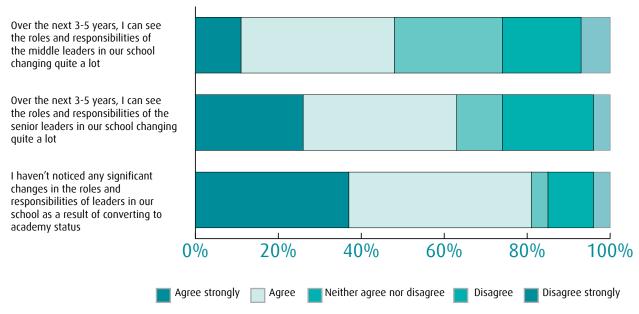
Chair of governors, converting academy

"I'm hoping that when you talk to my staff there's no difference, we don't feel there is a difference."

Senior leader, converting academy

The core vision of sponsored academies is focused on raising attainment and improving pupil outcomes. The research found that in almost all the sponsored academies visited, there was a strong focus on aligning leadership structures to teaching and learning outcomes by expanding the middle tier of leadership.

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23   The base is 27 for this question.

Figure 7.1: Impact of conversion on leadership structures, roles and responsibilities in converting academies

Base: 27
Only headteachers/academy principals were asked to respond to this question
Source: PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011

Alignment of leadership structures with pupil outcomes

"The heads [in the predecessor schools] wanted to be heads rather than work to an overall principal, so they left."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

"He put a lot more people on [the] leadership [pay] scale and gave them a lot more responsibility. He also pulled in a couple of advanced skills teachers to strengthen that middle band."
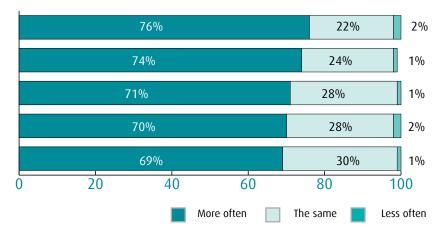
Middle leader, sponsored academy

Case study 7, from a sponsored academy, provides an example of how devolving responsibility and increasing the accountability of middle leaders have contributed to improving outcomes.

Sponsored academies, in particular, are charged with using their freedoms to develop strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and learning outcomes. The findings from the sponsored academies survey suggest that they were using a wider range of leadership strategies in their academy context, compared with the predecessor school, or compared with the maintained schools in which respondents had previously worked.

Figure 7.2[24] illustrates the top five leadership strategies that were considered by leaders to be used more often in their academy than in the previous maintained school they had worked in. For each of the top five leadership strategies, the majority of respondents (regardless of the number of years they worked in their academy) reported using each of them more often in their academy compared to the previous maintained school context.

Four-fifths or more of all respondents in sponsored academies indicated that the strategies that had been in place since becoming an academy had been effective in raising standards. This is affirmed by research, including the NAO (2010) report.

A small minority of respondents (no more than 6 per cent) indicated that these strategies were used less often in their academy compared with the last maintained school they worked with. The exception to this was the response to the option 'working with, and supporting, other schools/academies', where a sizeable minority of almost one-fifth (19 per cent) of respondents indicated that this was used less often than in the maintained school they worked in previously. This is consistent with earlier findings in relation to collaboration, and might be explained by the intense pressure within these academies to rapidly raise standards.

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24 86 per cent of sponsored academy survey respondents previously worked in a maintained school setting. The survey data suggests that the academy context may be more (or equally) challenging than their previous maintained school. For example, 45 per cent of survey respondents indicated that the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM was higher than the previous maintained school context, and a further 47 per cent indicated it was the same. The fact that a high proportion of sponsored academy survey respondents reported using a range of leadership strategies more often in their academy compared with in the previously maintained school is likely to reflect the context of the academy within which they now work.

Figure 7.2: Top five leadership strategies used in survey respondent's academy (compared with last maintained school they worked in)

	More often	The same	Less often
Monitoring performance data to pin-point gaps in pupil attainment and progression	76%	22%	2%
Raising pupil aspirations (eg through putting in place a more appropriate curriculum	74%	24%	1%
Putting in place specific support for pupils who are not progressing according to expectations	71%	28%	1%
Monitoring teacher performance	70%	28%	2%
Better tailoring of the curriculum	69%	30%	1%

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010

Case study 7
Impact of leadership structures on student outcomes

Background

The academy opened in 2006 following the closure of two predecessor schools. The proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals is well above the national average and reflects the social and economic circumstances of its catchment; it serves one of the most deprived areas of the city. The academy was visited by Ofsted in 2009 and received an overall grade of good, with leadership and management given an 'outstanding' rating.

Sponsorship

The academy is sponsored by a religious organisation. Sponsors played a key role in the development of the vision and ethos of the school. They have a daily presence in the school which helps to reinforce the vision and ethos. Leaders are aware of a high degree of accountability to the sponsor.

Leadership structure of the academy

The leadership structure includes 1 principal, 2 vice principals, 6 assistant vice principals (also head of houses), 18 middle leaders, some of whom are subject/faculty based and some project based, a number of lead practitioners and emergent leaders. The academy has been structured into vertical groupings and six houses, which means that the children are in the same house as their siblings. These changes have enabled the development of middle leaders with increased responsibility and accountability.

Benefits of leadership model

For staff:

— improved relationships and increased sharing of expertise

— more identification of talent and growing talent earlier in a person's career

— increased accountability

For pupils:

— pupil/family issues can be dealt with more holistically

— staff get to know particular groups of children and stay with them for longer periods of time; ultimately this impacts on their engagement with learning

— reduction in bullying

Impact on pupil outcomes

The leadership and pastoral structures that are in place, along with the changes in relation to teaching and learning, have contributed to a rapid improvement in student attainment.

"95 per cent [of pupils achieved an] A*-C [grade at GCSE] with over 30 per cent including English and Maths in 2010, and 37 students went to university compared with zero when the academy opened."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

Table 7.2: Teaching and learning strategies in sponsored academies

Category	Components	Supporting evidence
Timetabling	— Altering length of school day	"We start at 8.30am and finish at 2.30pm. This enables a work life balance. With the change in the school day, we have been able to offer more enrichment activities. This flexibility has allowed us to enrich the lives of young people beyond academic performance to include sports, music and drama." Senior leader, sponsored academy
Monitoring pupil performance	— Target setting/use of targets — Better use of data — Setting according to ability — Use of faculty/department reviews — Provide additional support to students (eg, prior to sitting exams	"We use a module grade system that assesses students each half-term and this links to their sub-level targets for the year. Children that are flagged up as struggling are picked up and we work hard to support them." Middle leader, sponsored academy "The school has three bands – red (entirely academic); blue (mixture of academic and vocational), and green (focus on life skills). The pupils who are in the green route excel in practical [subjects, but they also have an] academic focus." Senior leader, sponsored academy "Since becoming an academy, we have introduced faculty reviews." Senior leader, sponsored academy
Focusing on pupil behaviour	— Getting the rules of engagement right — Walking around and observing class conduct	"We were clear from the start what we weren't going to do… [we] set out the stall from the start." Senior leader, sponsored academy "[We] do the walk, crucially going into classrooms, without intruding… just enforcing what we expect" Senior leader, sponsored academy

Category	Components	Supporting evidence
Leadership capacity-building	— Continuing professional development — More frequent lesson observation/teacher support	"For our gifted and talented maths students we worked with two other teachers from one of the other academies in the federation. We learned from their approach and style and then spread it to the rest of the department." Middle leader, sponsored academy "We will stand next to, in front of, behind a member of staff and say we're here." Senior leader, sponsored academy
Critical reflection	— Self-evaluation — External evaluation	"We do self-evaluation – we do self-reviews once a term as this enables us to look at how things are working in different classrooms." Middle leader, sponsored academy "We brought in external consultants including some with Her Majesty's Inspection experience to provide external inspection every half-term." Senior leader, sponsored academy

A number of examples of teaching and learning strategies were identified in the case studies with sponsored academies. These are consistent with those reported by PwC (2008), and include altering the length of the school day, improvements in relation to target setting, addressing pupil behaviour, and leadership capacity-building. In practice, many maintained schools have benefitted from some of these freedoms in the past, eg, freedom to alter the length of the school day or school term. However, academy status formalises those freedoms and creates an expectation for change which, in turn, empowers schools to make decisions without having to seek the permission of others (for example, the local authority).

Converting academies had existing strong systems of leadership accountability in terms of pupil outcomes, as well as successful teaching and learning strategies. The findings from the case studies suggest that most converting academies had no immediate plans to use their freedoms to radically change their teaching and learning strategies. However, some interviewees suggested that they did have plans to use their academy freedoms in the future to further improve learning and learning

outcomes. Table 7.3 illustrates some of the plans that were identified.

Operational leadership

The research literature suggests that the skills required by academy leaders are wide ranging and include political, decision-making and personal skills (Davies and Macaulay, 2006). In addition, the framework compiled by the National College (2011) identifies qualities and behaviours that are expected of academy leaders, such as securing and maintaining transformational change, as well as personal characteristics, such as courage, patience and resilience.

The academies survey invited senior and middle leaders in sponsored and converting academies to indicate whether, compared with a maintained school, certain attributes were more/the same/less important for leaders to have in an academy context.

Table 7.3: Converting academy plans to use academy freedoms

Category	Supporting evidence
Altering structure of school day and school year	"We want to look at and consider the whole of the structured teaching day and [academy status] gives us the opportunity to do that." Senior leader, converting academy
Curriculum review	"We've got to think about how we tailor the curriculum to actually meet the needs of the secondary school... we need to think about the curriculum we need in the early years and Key Stage 2 which provides the foundation for the seniors." Senior leader, converting academy
A broader curriculum	"Bottom line is that we'd love to be able to offer a broader curriculum eg, Mandarin, dance and astronomy." Senior leader, converting academy

The response to these questions from senior and middle leaders in both sponsored and converting academies will have been informed by their pre-academy context and experience. For example, many sponsored academies will have undergone significant change at strategic, organisational and operational levels, and this will have had an impact on the degree of importance they place on specific skills/attributes. In addition some leaders in sponsored academies will have transferred from a predecessor school while others – especially senior leaders – may well have come from another school.

In contrast, all converting academies involved in the research had only recently converted or were in the process of converting to academy status. Therefore, they will only have had a limited amount of time to assess the skills and attributes required within their new context. In addition, most of these academies have been operating as outstanding schools for some time, are generally more confident in the skills and attributes of their existing leadership team and would, therefore, have been making their judgements against this benchmark.

Some caution, therefore, needs to be exercised in interpreting the results below. However, even allowing for this, the findings are interesting. Table 7.4 points to some similarities and some differences between the two sets of respondents in terms of the top five most important attributes identified.

The top five attributes chosen were almost the same for leaders in both sets of academies.

However, compared with leaders in sponsored academies, a lower proportion of leaders in converting academies consistently choose the same attributes. Between one-fifth and one-third of respondents in converting academies indicated that being a risk-taker; being resilient; being decisive and being creative were more important attributes for leaders in academies to have, compared with over one half of respondents who consistently identified these attributes in sponsored academies.

The higher scoring among the sponsored academy leaders is probably a reflection of two factors. First, they have had more experience of using and understanding what academy freedoms actually mean in practice. Second, the nature of the challenges they have had to face in turning around a failing or seriously underperforming school means that they need to demonstrate greater energy, drive, and resilience.

The findings presented below provide a summary of the views of national stakeholders and leaders in academy case studies.

Attributes required by academy leaders

"Risk-taking, creativity, self-motivation are all very important. As an academy leader you also need resilience to go in and be certain that you can keep on leading it."

National stakeholder

Table 7.4: Top five attributes that are more important for leaders to have in an academy than in a maintained school

Attribute	Per cent of respondents (sponsored academies)	Per cent of respondents (converting academies)
Excited by autonomy and freedom	69% (1)	64% (1)
Risk-taker	56% (2)	35% (2)
Creative	50% (=5)	27% (3)
Decisive	50% (=5)	25% (4)
Resilience	55% (3)	21% (5)
Energy and drive	51% (4)	-

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011
Base for sponsored academies: 175
Base for converting academies: 204

"There is a greater opportunity for creativity and entrepreneurial skill to be expressed in the context of an academy [and] there is also a greater need for these attributes."

National stakeholder

"Leadership of an academy is perhaps much more focused, primarily on getting results and there is no complacency. It is about doing what it right for the students [and involves] taking risks to allow change."

Senior leader, sponsored academy

A key objective of the research was to understand how leading in an academy is different from leading in a maintained school. The freedoms associated with academy status suggest that a number of skills, whilst important in all school contexts, may be more important in an academy context. Table 7.5 identifies the top five skills identified by respondents in both types of academies as being more important in an academy context. The following observations are notable from the data:

— Political and diplomatic skills were ranked first or second in order of importance by respondents in both types of academy. This may indicate that academy leaders were aware of the contested policy context within which academies have operated, which has attracted both political and media attention. Therefore, leaders might expect that academy status will bring an additional layer of scrutiny.

— There was agreement among respondents in sponsored and converting academies in relation to four of the top five skills. However, respondents in sponsored academies were more consistent in their choice of skills, with over half of all respondents agreeing on the top four.

— Whilst financial management/budgeting skills was ranked fourth in order of importance for respondents in sponsored academies, nonetheless, it is notable that over half of all respondents identified this as an important skill.

In addition and linked to the last bullet point above, over 70 per cent of respondents in converting academies indicated that their school previously had GM status. When the views of respondents from converting academies that were formerly GM schools were compared with the views of respondents in converting academies that did not previously have this status, there was some variation. For example:

— 19 per cent of respondents in converting academies that were formerly GM believed that planning and organisational skills were more important in an academy context, compared with 43 per cent of survey respondents in converting academies that did not previously have this status.

— 63 per cent of respondents in converting academies that were formerly GM rated financial management/budgeting skills as more important in an academy context compared with 82 per cent of survey respondents in converting academies that did not previously have this status.

Table 7.5: Top five skills that are more important for leaders to possess/demonstrate in an academy context than a maintained school context

Skill	Per cent of respondents (sponsored academies)	Per cent of respondents (converting academies)
Political/ diplomatic skills	60% (1)	43% (2)
Dealing with accountability	56% (2)	35% (3)
Change management skills	55% (3)	26% (4)
Financial management/budgeting skills	52% (4)	68% (1)
HR skills (eg, recruiting new staff)	45% (5)	-
Negotiating/influencing skills	-	25% (=5)
Planning and organisational skills	-	25% (=5)

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011
Base for sponsored academies: 176
Base for converting academies: 201

— A number of the top five identified skills were more frequently identified by respondents in primary converting academies. For example, 77 per cent of respondents in converting primary schools identified financial management/ budgeting skills, compared with 64 per cent of secondary converting academies. Other skills with notable differences between primary and secondary converting academies included:

• dealing with accountability (46 per cent versus 30 per cent)

• negotiating/influencing skills (38 per cent versus 19 per cent)

The increased frequency with which primary converting academy respondents identified these skills might be a reflection of the perceived capacity of primary school leaders in terms of maximising the opportunities that independence and the associated freedoms offer.

It should be noted that there was some variation in the views of respondents in sponsored academies with different sponsorship arrangements. For example:

— A greater proportion of respondents in academies with a single sponsor identified dealing with accountability (64 per cent) compared with 50 per cent who have chain sponsors[25] and 47 per cent who have group sponsors[26].

— In relation to financial management/ budgeting skills, 62 per cent of respondents from academies with a single sponsor thought these were more important in an academy compared with 45 per cent of respondents in chain-sponsored academies, and 51 per cent of respondents in academies with group sponsors.

The variation in the views of respondents in relation to these particular skills may be indicative of the established centralised financial procedures that most chain or group sponsors have in place. The key point, however, is that the sponsorship model will have implications for the skills that leaders require.

Table 7.6 provides examples of the views of senior and middle leaders in sponsored academies in relation to each of the top skills identified by survey respondents.

Over one-half (55 per cent) of sponsored academies identified change management skills as being more important in the context of an academy. This was not surprising given that many sponsored academies had been established with a new name, a new uniform, and in some cases a new building. In addition, these outward expressions of change had been accompanied by new governance and management structures, and a new vision for the school. This required academy leaders in sponsored academies (particularly academy principals) to possess strong change management skills.

25　These are sponsors that sponsor more than one academy.

26　These are sponsored academies that have two or more sponsors.

Many of the interviewees in the sponsored academy case study schools alluded to the pressures involved in managing this process. It was particularly noted in one academy that establishing a new school required a range of skills to bring about change (Case study 8).

Table 7.6: Views of leaders in sponsored academies on the skills required to lead an academy

Skill	Sponsored academy evidence
Political/ diplomatic skills	"For political reasons, academies are viewed by unions as being a major issue in education. In order to show the academy in a good light we need to work harder to maintain our very high standards that we had in the predecessor school." Survey respondent, sponsored academy
Dealing with accountability	"Each learning zone is now more accountable for what it spends and how it spends it. A learning zone leader has to see everything that goes out… which probably wasn't the case in the old school." Middle leader, sponsored academy
Change management skills	"Change management is needed as there is more likely to be frequent change in a [sponsored] academy." Survey respondent, sponsored academy
Financial management	"It's the same skill [financial management] needed but with better professionalism." Middle leader, sponsored academy "We have our own individual budgets and more freedom on how we spend them." Middle leader, sponsored academy
HR skills (eg, recruiting new staff)	"We are more responsible and accountable for human resources due to changes in pay and conditions." Survey respondent, sponsored academy

Case study 8

The importance of managing change in a sponsored academy

Background

This school is part of a chain of academies. It opened in 2009 and has an enrolment of c 1,300 pupils. The socio-economic context of the school is mixed and it is located in a reasonably aspirational area of town, situated in an area of high deprivation. The school is over subscribed.

Managing the change involved in establishing a new school

Strong leaders should be in place prior to becoming an academy. The principal explained the importance of having a strong leadership team in place with a complementary range of skills. It was noted that being able to recruit staff from other academies within the group was one of the benefits of being part of a chain.

> "I believe we've had a fantastic year this year. People must not underestimate how difficult it is to set things up – it is vital to have a strong complementary team of vice principals."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy

> "Ideally, growing your own from within to the philosophy, practices, procedures and systems and routines is hugely beneficial – you save time and hit the ground running."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy

Understanding the demands of leading an academy is critical. The principal stated that schools should not underestimate that the pace of change in an academy is faster and this requires huge stamina.

> "You need to be able to have huge stamina. In a maintained school – and it's not true of all – people may clock in and clock out – you need to go above and beyond normal hours."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy

> "You are dealing a lot with the unexpected... you don't know what is going to hit you... I've noticed this so much more working in an academy."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy

It is essential to use the lead-in time effectively. Having time to prepare prior to becoming an academy was felt to be important in managing the change process. This included the principal being in post a year before the academy opened. Policies and contracts were in place well before the academy opened. Heads of departments and other staff benefitted from training sessions.

> "I had sessions where I worked with managers and head of departments... I had 40 staff working on the curriculum before the academy opened. They gave up time in the evenings... it was about bringing it right down to the basics and streaming it all through."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy

> Bringing people on board and developing a culture is challenging. Developing a new culture is a key challenge for academy leaders, particularly in sponsored academies where a new school has been established with a new vision and new staff. This creates challenges for leaders who are also working under intense pressure to raise standards rapidly.
>
> "When you have an amalgamation of a lot of staff from different backgrounds you need to understand where they are coming from and where the knowledge gaps might be and you need to be prepared to spend time bridging those gaps."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy
>
> "You need to have skills to develop a culture...we really expect [a lot from our] staff."
>
> Senior leader, sponsored academy

Leadership development

McKinsey & Co (2010) suggest that attracting and selecting those with the right qualities is critical to the overall leadership capacity of the system. They suggest that there are primarily three approaches to unlocking and developing future leadership talent. The first depends on self-identification by potential leaders, as well as the informal mechanisms by which leaders are coached and developed within schools. The second builds on this by providing opportunities for potential leaders to become involved in courses and programmes in order to build their capacity for and interest in leadership. The third approach goes one step further by guiding the careers of potential leaders by enabling them to take on new roles within their schools so that they can gain greater leadership experience, with the appropriate guidance and support.

In addition to establishing the necessary skills and attributes for leading an academy, a key focus of this research was to understand the extent to which academy leaders shared this analysis of the role of leadership development and to identify the leadership development requirements of senior and middle leaders in both sponsored and converting academies.

Findings from the survey with leaders in sponsored academies suggest that leadership development opportunities have been more widely available for senior and middle leaders since they opened as an academy. Table 7.7 illustrates the top five leadership development opportunities experienced by leaders in sponsored academies.
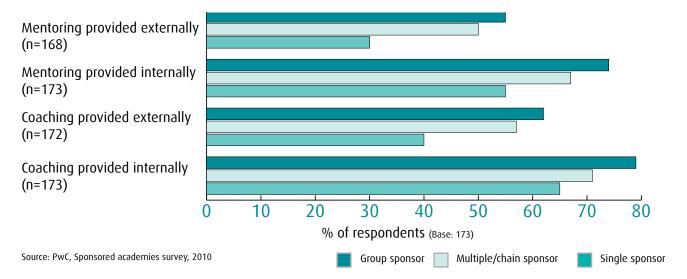
All the top five leadership development opportunities that senior and middle leaders had experienced since becoming an academy were

Table 7.7: Top five leadership development opportunities available to senior and middle leaders

Leadership development opportunity	Per cent of respondents indicating more widely available since academy opened
Coaching (internal)	69%
Mentoring (internal)	62%
Opportunities to learn on the job through peer-to-peer review	56%
Opportunities to learn on the job through action research	55%
Opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership (internal)	54%

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010. Base: 167

Figure 7.3: Coaching and mentoring opportunities in sponsored academies by type of sponsor

Mentoring provided externally (n=168)

Mentoring provided internally (n=173)

Coaching provided externally (n=172)

Coaching provided internally (n=173)

% of respondents (Base: 173)

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010

Group sponsor   Multiple/chain sponsor   Single sponsor

internally based. In addition, there were differences in the numbers of leaders experiencing this development according to the type of sponsorship model.

Respondents in academies with either chain or group sponsorship appeared to have had most opportunity for internal and external coaching and mentoring compared with academies with a single sponsor. This finding is consistent with findings from the sponsored academy case studies, which highlighted the significant potential for leadership development opportunities across the family of schools in academies with chain sponsors in particular. Figure 7.3 illustrates the types of training where notable differences existed in terms of sponsorship type.

Senior and middle leaders in converting academies were asked whether they thought there would be more leadership development opportunities as a result of converting to academy status. In overall terms, less than one-third of respondents believed there would be more opportunities to undertake various types of leadership training and development.

Table 7.8 details the top five leadership development opportunities identified by senior and middle leaders in converting academies.

Almost one-third (32 per cent) of the senior and middle leaders who responded to the survey believed that there may be more secondment opportunities to other schools. This might be linked to the plans that some academies have to become part of a wider cluster of schools (or indeed a soft/hard federation)[27]. Alternatively it could be an indication of the formal expectation placed on converting academies to work more collaboratively with other schools to raise standards.

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27 For example, one of the converting primary schools that was subject to a case study indicated that it had extensive plans to use academy status to become part of a larger federation of trust schools.

Table 7.8: Top five leadership development opportunities that may become more widely available as a result of converting to academy status

Leadership development opportunity	Per cent of respondents
Secondment opportunities to other schools	32%
Opportunities to learn on the job through peer-to-peer review	31%
Opportunities to learn on the job through action research	29%
Coaching (internal)	27%
Opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership (internal)	25%

PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011. Base: 119

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The remaining top five development opportunities identified by converting academies were internal in nature. These included more opportunity to learn on the job through peer-to-peer review, and through action research and internal coaching. One-quarter of respondents in converting academies indicated that there may be more opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership internally as a result of the school converting to academy status.

There was variation by school phase, with proportionately more leaders in converting primary academies, compared with leaders in converting secondary academies indicating that academy status would bring more leadership development opportunities. For example, 41 per cent of primary school respondents indicated that academy status would provide their senior and middle leaders with more opportunities to step up to the next level of leadership externally[28], compared to less than one-fifth (18 per cent) of respondents from secondary school academies. This may suggest that primary schools view academy status as an opportunity to deepen their relationships with other schools, for example by becoming part of a cluster.

The survey with senior and middle leaders in sponsored academies asked leaders to indicate, from a range of identified areas, whether there was a need for the National College, or another provider, to offer more leadership training or support.

In summary, the data in Table 7.9 suggests that the majority of respondents from sponsored academies would welcome support in all the identified areas. The area that respondents identified as requiring most support is leadership development, with approximately four-fifths (79 per cent) of all respondents in sponsored academies agreeing or strongly agreeing that there was a need for this. In addition, well over two-thirds of respondents indicated that they would welcome support in relation to:

— leadership of teaching and learning (71 per cent)

— networking and collaboration (68 per cent)

— management of staff performance and development (68 per cent)

— talent identification and management (67 per cent)

28 This leadership development opportunity was not one of the top five identified in Table 7.8. However, these data illustrate the leadership development opportunity where the largest variation was recorded by school phase.

Table 7.9: The extent to which survey respondents agreed there is a need for the National College to offer more leadership training

Leadership training needs	Per cent of respondents (sponsored academies)	Per cent of respondents (converting academies)
Leadership development	79%	56%
Leadership of teaching and learning	71%	41%
Management of staff performance and development	68%	40%
Networking and collaboration	68%	52%
Talent identification and management	67%	38%
Financial management	64%	69%
Recruitment and development of staff	58%	35%
Organisational/staffing structures	56%	39%
Setting the strategic vision	54%	41%

Source: PwC, Sponsored academies survey, 2010 and PwC, Converting academies survey, 2011. Base for sponsored academies: 178. Base for converting academies: 119

The data shows that the picture was somewhat different for converting academies. The majority of respondents identified a need for training in three areas, namely financial management, leadership development, and networking and collaboration. However, approximately two-fifths or fewer of the survey respondents in converting academies identified a need for further training in the other areas listed. The top three areas identified by most respondents in converting academies were largely consistent with both the additional freedoms and the additional responsibilities that academy status brings.

There was some variation by school phase with converting primary academies, in particular, welcoming further support from the National College or other providers in terms of talent identification and management. Over one-half of primary academies (51 per cent) indicated they would like more support in this area, compared with just over one-third (34 per cent) of secondary converting academies.

Converting primary schools also indicated that they would welcome further support from the National College or other providers in terms of networking and collaboration (72 per cent of primary converting academies indicated they would like more support for this compared with less than one-half (45 per cent) of secondary converting academies). This finding reflects the views expressed by senior and middle leaders in the case study visits and in stakeholder consultations with converting primary academies. For example, one senior leader suggested that there should be a broker to help primary schools collaborate more effectively with other schools in their area as, in this leader's view, collaboration was a greater challenge for primary converting academies than for secondary converting academies.

The case studies with both sponsored and converting academies suggest that there are particular ways in which the National College or other providers might deliver training. Table 7.10 illustrates a number of principles that could be adopted in the delivery of future training. Most academy interviewees highlighted the importance of providing bespoke training which takes account of the context of the academy. In addition, training should be dynamic in that it should reflect the journey of the academy and the experience of the leaders that are in place at various stages of that journey. Linked to this, training should be differentiated in terms of the roles and responsibilities expected within the context of the academy. For example some interviewees in converting academies suggested that there was a need to focus on middle leadership to enable

the school to unleash its creativity and embrace the opportunities that academy status offered in relation to innovation. The overwhelming view from interviewees was that the training should be designed and delivered by professionals with experience and knowledge of academies.

Linked to the above findings, Hopkins (2005) suggests that school leadership should be based on the distinctive and inclusive context of the school. This implies that the particular mix of skills of school leadership will differ, often dramatically, from context to context. In addition, Hopkins (2005) states that school leadership that is purposeful, inclusive and values-driven should involve a commitment to equity, empowerment and high standards of learning and achievement as the moral purpose of education.

Case study 9 illustrates the leadership challenges faced by a converting primary academy. It sets out the gaps in terms of leadership training and development. It also offers some suggestions as to how training and development provision could be enhanced to enable the academy to become a teaching school.

Table 7.10: Principles for delivering training to academy leaders

Delivery principle	Supporting evidence from case studies
Bespoke and designed to meet the needs of academies	"It needs to be specifically for academies rather than something where academies and maintained schools are pulled in... there are so many academies out there where training isn't really pitched at them." Middle leader, sponsored academy
Designed by individuals with a good knowledge of academies	"You need to have someone that is really aware of what academies are under and the good and the bad of being an academy." Middle leader, sponsored academy
Delivered in partnership with the academies	"New academies should be supported by leadership teams [from] academies that have already done it. The National College could broker this." Senior leader, converting academy "Leaders in academies should be utilised for training purposes." Middle leader, sponsored academy
Differentiated provision for different leadership roles in an academy (senior leader, middle leader and non-hierarchical; ie emerging leaders)	"[There] needs to be a specific programme for senior leaders of academies." Senior leader, sponsored academy "There is a need for leadership programmes for academy heads and for senior and middle leaders as their roles are very different." Senior leader, sponsored academy "For middle leaders, training is about no longer being told you are good if you comply with what the book says... they now need to be able to innovate themselves... They need help to free up the creativity that has been stunted in the past." Senior leader, converting academy
Organised into a **menu of options**	"You have to have a menu because what I [need] is very different to what a grammar school will need... some core things should be on the menu including independence/freedoms, charity company law, TUPE, finance." Senior leader, sponsored academy

Case study 9
Leadership training and development to help a school become a teaching school

Background

This school is a primary school and has a very strong independent ethos and tradition of being autonomous. It was previously a GM school before becoming a foundation school and then a trust school. It recently converted to academy status. The school has grown quite rapidly from having c 150 pupils in 1986 to c 900 pupils today, and is a five-form entry primary. Almost half the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has an executive headteacher and headteacher, two assistant headteachers for juniors and early years respectively, and seven team/cluster leaders with responsibility for five classes in a year group.

Academy challenges

The school faces a number of challenges in the longer term. They include:

— continuing to maintain high standards and meet expectations

— managing high turnover of staff

— finding deputy headteachers of the necessary quality, who are prepared to teach for up to three-quarters of their time

— recruiting and retaining staff for the middle school curriculum

> "Finding good deputies [is a challenge]... I have got two assistant heads at the moment but it is finding deputies who are of the necessary quality to take us on."

> Senior leader, converting academy

Ambitions for leadership and development

The school views academy status very positively. Leaders view it as an opportunity to take control of a number of challenging areas such as class size. Leaders indicate that they have the capacity to provide many of the services (eg, teacher training) they need more effectively themselves.

The headteacher is a teacher leader and takes a key role in teacher training. He spends one day a week in the classroom and the other four days on: monitoring plans; observing teachers and checking observations (15-20 newly qualified teacher (NQT) observations every half-term); co-ordinating the induction programme, and dealing with parents and discipline issues. The school views the opportunity to become a teaching school very positively and this is where its senior leadership team would like to take the school.

Areas for support

The school would value the National College as a critical friend in helping the school become a teaching school. This would involve the National College in helping the school assess the strengths and weaknesses of its management structures and assisting it to develop specific programmes that the academy would deliver for young/emerging leaders. The school is also interested in sending its leaders to the National College for them to meet peers, and reflect upon their own practice.

> "We would like an organisation such as the National College to be a critical friend to us, to be outside of that, to look at that and to look at our management structures and give us an overview of our success or failures and to work with us to provide what I consider to be high-quality CPD and young managers' training."
>
> Senior leader, converting academy

> "There is something powerful [about] sending someone away to the National College for a week and having reflection time and talking through things and coming back with a slightly different perspective."
>
> Senior leader, converting academy

Summary and discussion

Strategic leadership in academies was strongly influenced by the context of the school. In particular, the research suggests that it is important to take account of the starting-point at the time of converting in terms of pupil attainment, as this had influenced the motivations of leaders in desiring academy status, and was also reflected in the vision and core values of the school. There was a strong desire among the majority of respondents in sponsored academies that academy freedoms would be used to put in place appropriate structures and systems to enable the new vision, which had generally focused on raising the aspirations and attainment of pupils, to be owned and achieved. The nature of the challenges for strategic leadership was linked to the context of the school. Therefore, for strategic leadership in sponsored academies, the key challenge was to implement organisational change with the aim of achieving the vision of the school.

In contrast, converting academies involved in the research, all of which were high-achieving schools, already had a strong vision in place, and this was very much rooted in being centres of excellence in terms of educational provision, and in pushing their students to be the best. Leaders of converting academies viewed academy status as a positive enabler to maintaining or raising standards even further, but it was not for the most part seen as an opportunity to alter the vision and ethos of their school.

In relation to organisational leadership, the research confirmed that the leadership model in sponsored academies was influenced by the sponsorship model; in particular whether the academy was operating as part of a chain, or was a free-standing academy trust. Linked to the key challenge of sponsored academies, which focused on raising pupils' aspirations and attainment, in almost all the sponsored academies visited, there was a strong focus on aligning leadership structures with teaching and learning outcomes by expanding the middle tier of leadership, in recognition of their key role in improving outcomes. Although senior leadership in sponsored academies has generally been initially very directive in order to drive school improvement, it has also been accompanied by giving middle leaders greater responsibility and accountability for teaching and learning strategies, either on a faculty or year-group basis. The research suggests that sponsored academy trusts that incorporate more than one school were also able to develop leaner senior leadership structures due to leadership responsibilities operating across the phases, as is the case, for example, in all-through academies. In relation to leadership strategies, the findings from the survey with sponsored academies suggest that, compared with their predecessor schools, or compared with the maintained schools in which respondents had previously worked, sponsored academies were using a wider range of leadership strategies. In practice, many maintained schools have benefitted from some of these freedoms in the past. Therefore, academy status formalises those freedoms and creates an expectation for change which, in turn, empowers schools to make decisions without having to seek the permission of others (for example, the local authority).

In contrast, the leadership structures in converting academies tended to be more traditional. It is important to note that there were exceptions to this. Given the attainment profile of these schools, it was not surprising that most converting academies had no immediate plans to use their freedoms to radically change their teaching and learning strategies. However, some interviewees suggested that they did have plans to use their academy freedoms in the future to further improve learning and learning outcomes.

Therefore, as with sponsored academies, some converting academies may use their academy status to change the leadership model and a wider range of leadership models/structures may emerge within these academies, as the programme develops.

In terms of operational leadership, the research evidence points to some overall agreement between respondents in sponsored and converting academies in relation to the skills that were more important for leaders in an academy context. However, there were variations within and between sponsored and converting academies in terms of the degree of importance placed on these skills. The key point to note is that variations in relation to the particular skills required to lead an academy appear to be linked to the existing and previous context of the school, thus for sponsored academies, the type of sponsorship model in place, and for converting academies, whether or not the school had previous GM status, or whether it was a primary or secondary academy.

The majority of respondents from sponsored academies indicated that they would welcome support from the National College or other providers in a range of areas, including leadership development, leadership of teaching and learning, networking and collaboration, management of staff performance, and development and talent identification.

The majority of respondents in converting academies identified a need for training in three main areas: financial management, leadership development, and networking and collaboration. Notably, the top three areas identified by most respondents in converting academies were largely consistent with the additional freedoms and responsibilities that academy status brings. There was also variation by school phase, with proportionately more leaders in converting primary academies, compared with leaders in converting secondary academies, indicating that academy status would bring more leadership development opportunities. Most academy interviewees highlighted the importance of providing bespoke training which takes account of the context of the academy. Linked to this point, many respondents stated that training should be differentiated in terms of the roles and responsibilities expected within the context of the academy, including, for converting academies whether or not it is a primary or secondary academy. Finally, the overwhelming view from interviewees was that the training should be designed and delivered by professionals with experience and knowledge of academies.

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8. Conclusions and implications

This section of the report sets out the key findings and conclusions from the research, and the implications of these in terms of leadership development.

This section is structured under the following headings:

— Introduction

— Key findings and conclusions

— Implications for leadership development

Introduction

This research project focused on:

— established academies in order to understand what is distinctive about leading a successful academy and the leadership development implications of this

— recently converted academies in order to establish an improved understanding of what is distinctive about leadership of these academies and the conversion journey, and what this looks like in practice

A number of research questions (see section 1) were identified by the National College and these guided the approach to the research. The key findings from the research (below) have addressed all the research questions. In addition, there are suggested implications of these findings for leadership development in academies.

Key findings and conclusions

The importance of academy context

Understanding the context within which academies operate is critical to developing an understanding of what is distinctive about leading an academy. The context of the school includes the challenges that the school faces; these challenges influence the motives for becoming an academy. Context includes a range of factors such as socio-economic background of pupils, and previous status of the school, eg, grant maintained (GM), foundation or trust, In addition, it includes the school's previous history of relationships with the local authority and working in collaboration with other schools.

The findings suggest that independence and autonomy are key motivating factors in themselves for both sponsored and converting academies, but for different reasons. For example, financial autonomy and increased levels of funding were of particular importance for converting academies to maintain the levels of provision in place prior to conversion, whereas the primary motivation for independence in sponsored academies was to use this independence to help raise standards rapidly.

The challenges in moving to academy status were linked to the motivations for becoming an academy. For sponsored academies, with the new freedoms and additional resources that accompanied academy status, came enormous pressure to achieve rapid improvement. Therefore, the subsequent challenges for leaders in these academies were of a strategic and operational nature, and included, for example, revisiting the vision and ethos of the school and realigning leadership structures. Each of these was directly linked to improving pupil outcomes.

In comparison, the challenges for leaders in converting academies, with the exception of managing opposing stakeholders, were largely administrative and procedural, and were not linked to pupil outcomes. The administrative nature of the process for converting academies suggests that academy status for these schools was viewed as an opportunity to gain or, in the case of former grant-maintained schools, regain autonomy from the local authority rather than an opportunity to do things radically differently.

Sponsorship, governance and the local authority

Sponsorship

Sponsored academies were generally of the view that sponsors added value in many ways.

Academies that converted under the new arrangements are not required to have sponsorship arrangements in place, but are required to establish an academy trust. Leaders in converting academies were generally averse to the involvement of a sponsor and in some cases converting academies viewed the involvement of a sponsor as a replacement of the local authority. However, some interviewees in the converting academy case study visits indicated that they had not completely ruled out involving a sponsor at some time in the future. The general consensus was that whilst it might be desirable for a sponsor to have some previous educational experience, the sponsor would also have to offer more tangible contributions such as additional resources or finance.

However, the views of leaders in converting academies may also reflect a lack of understanding of how sponsorship has in practice been working and there could be value in providing opportunities for converting academy leaders to observe and engage with sponsors.

Governance

Compared with the maintained sector, the governance structure for sponsored academies radically changed with academy status. For example, for academies with chain sponsorship there are two tiers of governance (one operating at a central level for all academies within the chain and a separate governing body for each academy). This was reported to have resulted in sharper scrutiny of performance. Governors, under the direction of the sponsor, played a key role in setting and communicating the new vision for the school.

The case study visits suggested that a number of governing bodies in converting academies had employed the services of legal advisers to manage risk and to provide the necessary assurances to governors.

In contrast to sponsored academies, there was little change in the composition, structure and roles of the governing body in converting academies. However, governors recognised that they had taken on more responsibility for accountability. Converting academies started from a higher base in terms of the skills and attributes of governors already in place. Consultation with academies that converted from Trust status indicated that they have continued to include some or all of their external Trust partners in the new academy governance arrangements.

The local authority

Almost one-half of sponsored academy respondents to the survey indicated that their relationship with the local authority had become weaker since they had become an academy. This was consistent with the case study findings, which suggested that the relationship between sponsored academies and their local authority was light-touch. The quality of the relationship was considered to be fairly positive, particularly where the local authority was the sponsor or had supported the establishment of an academy. Existing challenges between sponsored academies and local authorities related to, for example, the cost of buying in or buying back services previously provided by the local authority.

It would appear that the shift in power between academies and the local authority was less evident for converting academies, many of which already had a more distant relationship prior to becoming an academy.

The majority of sponsored and converting academy respondents to the survey indicated that they did see a continuing role for the local authority in their area[29]. However, most believed that their local authority should have some degree of engagement with their academy. Converting academies indicated that there was a role for the local authority in relation to the provision of operational support/ services eg, HR, SEN and educational welfare services. A large proportion of schools involved in the case study visits indicated that they will continue to buy in at least some of the services previously provided by the local authority. However, the cost of buying in services from the local authority was highlighted as an issue for both sponsored and converting academies.

Collaboration with other schools

The evidence suggests that, to date, academy status has had little impact on the nature and degree of collaboration for either type of academy. However, academy status does bring additional responsibilities in terms of collaboration and some academies indicated that they had plans to progress this in a more flexible way than could be done within the local authority. Therefore, there is the potential

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29   This is taken to mean the area over which the local authority operates.

for this to affect the context within which leaders operate.

Few schools, including those that are national support schools (NSSs), had plans to reduce the amount of collaboration they undertook. It is expected that converting will have little impact on this role, unless this is developed by converting academies. In particular, leaders in primary schools expressed an interest in not only maintaining current levels of collaboration but in expanding their networks with other schools.

Leading an academy

Strategic leadership

There were some similarities in the vision and values of both sponsored and converting academies in that leaders in both academy types strive for every child to achieve its full potential. The key difference, however, was the starting-point in terms of pupil attainment. For many sponsored academies, where attainment had previously been low, raising the aspirations and ambitions of pupils featured strongly in their vision and values statement. For a significant proportion of converting academies, many of which were already high achieving, their vision was to be recognised and have the freedom to develop as a high-quality provider of education.

The strategic leadership challenges identified by academies (whether sponsored or converting) were directly linked to their motivation for wishing to become an academy. Thus for sponsored academies, a lot of strategic leadership effort was focused on developing and implementing teaching and learning strategies related to raising pupil aspirations and attainment. Related challenges included pupils' background and interest in learning, and the quality of teaching staff.

For converting academies, their top two key challenges related to funding and financial resources, and buying in support services, although these priorities are likely to change when these schools become established academies. Their primary motivation for becoming an academy was financial autonomy. The negative economic outlook may have acted to spur many of these early converting academies, given the significant reductions in budget that all schools are going to face. Buying in support services was a key challenge for converting primary schools (56 per cent mentioned this as one of their top three challenges compared with 24 per cent of secondary schools).

Organisational leadership

Sponsored academies had put in place a number of leadership strategies to improve the quality of learning and learning outcomes. The top five leadership strategies used more often in sponsored academies (than in the previous maintained school context) centred on understanding and meeting the needs of pupils, eg, monitoring performance data to pin-point gaps in pupil attainment and progression. The majority of sponsored academies reported that this had been effective in helping to raise standards, and the NAO report (2010) affirms this.

Most converting academies were already high achieving, and therefore did not have extensive plans to introduce new leadership strategies to improve learning and learning outcomes. Data from the case study visits indicates that some academies did plan in the future to implement a broader curriculum, as well as enhancing their extra-curricular offering.

Generally, leaders in sponsored academies observed that since the school had become an academy, there was a distinctive business-like feel to how it operated. Senior leadership in sponsored academies has tended initially to be more directive in order to drive school improvement. However, it has also been accompanied by giving middle leaders greater responsibility and accountability for teaching and learning strategies. The research suggests that sponsored academy trusts that incorporate more than one school were able to develop leaner senior leadership structures due to leadership responsibilities operating, for example, across phases.

In the majority of converting academies, a traditional leadership structure operated (ie, typically a headteacher supported by one or more deputy heads and assistant heads with a number of middle leaders working together in a single school and including a degree of distributed leadership.) It is important to note that there are exceptions to this. This type of leadership structure was believed to have served schools well prior to conversion to an academy. However, some interviewees suggested that they did have plans to use their academy freedoms to change the leadership model. Therefore, a wider range of leadership models/structures may emerge within converting academies as the programme develops.

In the short-term, it would appear that academy status will have little significant impact on roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in converting academies. However, increased financial autonomy will have an impact on the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders (headteacher/principal and business manager/bursar).

Operational leadership

There were differences in the attributes and skills that sponsored and converting academy leaders highlighted as being most important. However, their responses in part are likely to reflect both the context and experience of the schools they were working in prior to their school becoming an academy.

In relation to the key leadership attributes identified by academy leaders in an academy context, the most important attributes included: being excited by autonomy and freedom; being a risk-taker; being creative; decisive; resilient, and having energy and drive. With the exception of the first of these attributes, a lower proportion of respondents from converting academies believed that these were more important in an academy context.

In relation to key leadership skills, sponsored and converting academies agreed on four of the top five skills that were more important in an academy context. These included: financial management/ budgeting skills, political/diplomatic skills; dealing with accountability, and change management skills. Political/diplomatic skills were ranked first or second in order of importance by respondents in both types of academy. There were contextual variations within both sets of academies in terms of the importance placed on particular skills. For example, converting academies that had previous GM status placed less importance on planning and organisational skills than did academies that did not previously have this status.

Primary converting academies placed more importance on financial management/budgeting skills than secondary converting academies. In addition, respondents in academies with a single sponsor placed more importance on dealing with accountability than respondents in chain-sponsored and group-sponsored academies.

Primary schools also recognised that certain skills were more important in an academy context. This may indicate that a greater proportion of primary academies had no previous experience of operating in an independent context such as GM status. Particular skills thought to be more important for primary schools were: financial management, dealing with accountability, and negotiating/ influencing skills.

Leadership development

Leadership development opportunities for senior and middle leaders in sponsored academies had been more widely available since the school opened as an academy, although the top five leadership development opportunities identified were internally based. Respondents in academies with either a chain or group sponsorship model had more opportunity for internal and external coaching and mentoring compared with those with a single sponsor. The majority of respondents in sponsored academies would welcome support in: leadership development, leadership of teaching and learning, networking and collaboration, management of staff performance and development, and talent identification and management.

Less than one-third of leaders in converting academies indicated that there would be more leadership development opportunities as a result of converting to academy status. In addition, almost one-third of senior and middle leaders indicated that there may be more secondment opportunities to other schools. The majority of respondents in converting academies identified a need for training in three areas: financial management, leadership development, and networking and collaboration.

Implications for leadership development

The findings from the research are used to propose ways to support and strengthen leadership across the academy sector. A number of specific areas are identified for further consideration (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Implications of research for leadership development

Training needs identified	Implication for leadership development
1. Training and research to support governance/sponsorship	— The research identifies a need for training for chairs of governors that reflects the different challenges and contexts facing sponsored and converting academies. — The research also points to a need to increase knowledge and understanding among academy leaders and governors in converting academies of the operation and potential value of academy sponsorship. This could be achieved through regional networks, national conferences and also the work of teaching schools.
2. Preparing leaders for the expansion of academy chains	— The research suggests that the growth of chains is likely to continue apace and that there is a need to help academy leaders think through the implications of this. In addition, it is important that, for those chains that do expand, the risks of scaling up their operations are identified and managed. — Linked to the above, there is a need to support the development of executive leaders, given the likelihood of an increase in applications for academy status from secondary and primary schools coming together within and across phases.
3. Supporting academy leaders to develop wider system roles	— Given the requirement for academies to collaborate more widely as a result of taking on academy status, there is a need to support the development of networking and collaborating skills in order to facilitate the wider role of academy leaders — The research suggests that there is a high level of interest among converting academies in becoming teaching schools. It would be useful to use teaching schools as a potential vehicle for embedding school-to-school support and collaboration across the system, and to increase leadership development opportunities.
4. Supporting leadership capacity-building and improvement	— Given the range of leadership challenges identified by sponsored and converting academies, continuing support should be available to academies that need or request assistance. The planned expansion of NLE and LLE programmes could provide a basis for continuing to support academies that need or request assistance, as should the development of specialist leaders of education (SLEs).

Training needs identified	Implication for leadership development
5. Understanding and enhancing the skills and attributes required by leaders in an academy context	— The research suggests that there are particular skills and attributes that are more important for leaders operating in an academy context. It would be useful to review, as planned, the qualities and behaviours and the accompanying commentary set out in the National College framework (2011).
	— The findings point to a need to provide newly appointed academy leaders with peer support to help them gain enhanced confidence and skills to understand and take full advantage of the freedoms associated with academy status.
	— Given that the research findings indicate that nearly two-thirds of academy leaders expect significant changes in leadership roles over the next three to five years, support is required for leaders to understand and prepare for these changes.
	— It is important to provide support to leaders to enable knowledge-sharing within the academy system.
	— It would be useful for senior leaders in academies to be supported in understanding and learning how to manage the changing roles and relationships between academies and local authorities.
6. Developing middle leaders and supporting succession planning	— The findings from the research indicate that there is a need for bespoke leadership development support that takes account of the context of academies. This should be differentiated for different levels of leadership and delivered in partnership with academies.
	— In addition, the findings highlight the need to address the differential in existing opportunities for leadership development assignments (ie, secondments) available to academy leaders. This would include, for example, opportunities available to leaders in academy chains versus the more limited opportunities available in free-standing academy trusts or academies with single sponsors.
7. Developing the skills of school business managers	— Aspiring academy leaders need to be fully aware of the financial strategic roles and responsibilities that are part of working in an academy context.
	— There is a need for development and training opportunities to keep pace with thinking and practice, given the dynamic way in which the academies programme is developing.

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Acknowledgements

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