



Department
for Education

Annex A - Trust Quality Descriptions

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Annex A – Trust Quality Descriptions

In the [Schools White Paper](#), the Department published five pillars of quality for multi-academy trusts. The first three pillars covered:

1. High-Quality and Inclusive Education
2. School Improvement
3. Workforce

The fourth and fifth pillars concerned Financial Management and Strategic Governance respectively. We have heard feedback about the importance of other centralised functions like human resources and estates management. We have also heard about the importance of being clear about the role of executive as well as non-executive leadership. To reflect this, we have expanded the pillars to cover:

4. Finance and Operations
5. Governance and Leadership

As part of the [Academies Regulatory and Commissioning Review](#), we committed to build on the Schools White Paper by setting out more detailed descriptions of each pillar. Following extensive engagement with the Review's External Advisory Group and other stakeholders, we set out the descriptions in draft form in April.

With minor changes, we are now adopting them formally alongside our commissioning guidance.

Together, the descriptions represent a clear and ambitious vision for the academies sector.

As set out in the guidance, stage two of our commissioning approach considers the quality of the trust. The descriptions define the types of quality factors that Regions Group can consider when making decisions. The descriptions should be read alongside the separate evidence annex which sets out the sources Regions Group will draw on to assess quality.

The descriptions will also inform wider policy-making and operational decision-making by the Department. We have, for example, closely aligned the descriptions and the [Multi-Academy Trust CEO Content Framework](#).

The descriptions are one of several ways in which we are providing greater clarity for the sector – helping to inform trusts' improvement and capacity-building priorities. The role of government is to define the outcomes we want trusts to achieve, but it is for the sector to identify and implement the most effective approaches to achieve them. As such, we have tried to avoid the descriptions stating *how* trusts should deliver outcomes.

As set out in the guidance, Regions Group will not make summative judgements about the quality of individual trusts. Commissioning is about identifying the right trust to manage a school in its context, or the best trust to grow within an area. Not every aspect of the descriptions will, therefore, be relevant to every decision.

High-Quality and Inclusive Education

Theme	Description
Culture	Creates a culture in all its schools that is motivating and ambitious for all, including disadvantaged children and children with SEND, so that students can achieve their full potential.
Curriculum	Oversees the design and implementation of ambitious, broad, well-sequenced and knowledge-rich curricula in all of its schools.
Student outcomes	Achieves good outcomes for all its students by delivering education that is both high-quality and inclusive.
Accessible to all	Operates fair access. Welcomes and effectively teaches disadvantaged children and children with SEND from their local areas.
Inclusive pastoral support	Supports students and schools to address issues so students can stay in mainstream school where possible. Supports students to re-join mainstream education when they have spent time in Alternative Provision.
Enrichment	Enables children to take part in sport, music and cultural opportunities that enrich the curricula and support children's wider development.
Behaviour & attendance	Ensures its schools are places where all students attend regularly, are kept safe, feel calm and supported, and are able to actively participate and progress.
Destinations	Ensures all children leave its schools well prepared for the next stage of education, employment or training and prepared to become confident citizens.
Collaboration	Works collaboratively with schools, trusts, local authorities, dioceses, parents and other civic partners to ensure the delivery of statutory functions and acts in the wider interests of the local community.

School Improvement

Theme	Description
Culture	Creates a culture of continuous improvement in its schools through self-evaluation, challenge, support and appropriate action.
School improvement model	Has a clearly defined and effective strategy to improve and maintain the performance of schools that are already part of the trust, as well as those that join.
Transformation	Takes on challenging schools and transforms previously underperforming schools by delivering broad and sustainable improvement.
System-led improvement	Supports the wider system in sharing best practice; helps underperforming schools to improve; and contributes to building a trust-led system.

Workforce

Theme	Description
Culture	Creates a high-performing working culture for all staff that promotes collaboration, aspiration and support. Uses the flexibilities of the trust structure to create opportunities for staff. Recognises the critical value of high-quality teaching and champions the profession.
Workload	Fosters a supportive working environment by managing workload, prioritising wellbeing and taking action to support all staff.
Retention	Supports the retention of great staff both within the individual trust and across the school system.
Working environment	Prioritises effective behaviour and attendance policies to create a safe environment in which to work and learn. Utilises the trust structure so that staff are empowered to deliver their best.
Developing new and early career teachers	Makes a positive contribution to the wider system by delivering high-quality training and/or placements for trainee teachers. Supports early career teachers through the Early Career Framework.
Continuing Professional Development	Encourages and enables all staff to build their expertise through evidence-based professional development and mentoring.
Collaboration	Builds an innovative and vibrant community of professionals, collaborating across schools and other trusts to develop and share expertise and evidence-based practice.
Line management & career progression	Ensures every member of staff is effectively line managed to maintain high performance. Actively encourages career progression opportunities across the trust.
Equality, diversity, inclusion	Ensures inclusive working environments, supports flexible working and takes action to promote equality and diversity.

Finance and Operations

Theme	Description
Culture	Recognises the importance of effective and efficient use of resources for the benefit of all schools in the trust and the wider education system.
Financial strategy	Uses financial data and intelligence to set a stable, accurate and sustainable long-term financial strategy for the trust. Has a clear approach to delivering value for money through effective budgeting and risk management.
Resource allocation	Demonstrates efficient and effective use of resources, for example through school and trust resource management benchmarking tools and Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning.
Capital strategy	Maintains and invests sustainably in the trust's capital infrastructure, including buildings, digital infrastructure and technology.
Reserves	Operates a well-planned reserves policy that provides sufficient contingency for cashflow and any unplanned, urgent expenditure and aligns resources to expenditure priorities across all its schools.
Financial information management	Has strong financial and information management systems with effective oversight, for example ensuring data compliance and having policies and processes in place to minimise risk of fraud, data breaches and financial mismanagement.

Governance and Leadership

Theme	Description
Culture	The board and executive leadership team anchor the trust's strategy in the needs of its schools, the communities they serve and the wider educational system in line with its charitable objects. The Accounting Officer, board and leadership team create a culture of ethical leadership, including the Seven Principles of Public Life.

The following description is for the trust's members:

Theme	Description
Governance of the trust	Ensures that the board is made up of trustees with the necessary expertise to fulfil its functions effectively, and that the board acts in accordance with the trust's charitable objects.

The following descriptions are for the trust's board and CEO:

Theme	Board	CEO	Both
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair leads the board to set and champion a clear strategy for the trust, which aligns with the trust's charitable objects, covers all pillars of trust quality and, where applicable, sets out its aspirations for growth over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads the trust executive leadership team to create and implement an effective trust operating model with clarity about the delivery of trust-level and school-level activities, that aligns with the strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review progress rigorously to ensure strategic alignment and effective implementation.

Theme	Board	CEO	Both
Executive Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures high-quality executive leadership through appointing its CEO and providing effective support and challenge to the CEO and executive leadership team. • Maintains sufficient independence from the executive leadership team to allow scrutiny of both their performance and organisational performance overall. • Sets clear objectives and effectively manages the CEO to ensure high performance. Secures appropriate levels of remuneration for the CEO and executive leadership team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads a high-performing executive leadership team. • Ensures that the executive leadership team acts within the levels of authority delegated by the board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in partnership to ensure effective relationships between executive leadership team and members of the board. • Ensure the executive leadership team has the expertise needed to fulfil functions delegated by the board, for example secure financial expertise. • Support effective succession planning by building a leadership pipeline.

Theme	Board	CEO	Both
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds executive leadership team to account for the effective implementation of the trust strategy and operating plan, including in relation to the use of resources and the drivers of impact. • Assures itself of the integrity of financial information. • Assures itself that there are robust risk controls and risk management systems. • Assures itself that there is compliance with regulatory, contractual, and statutory requirements, including safeguarding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets annual operating plan, budget, and implements effective operational systems to deliver on the trust's strategy. • Delivers effective risk management across the key functions of the trust. • Ensures compliance with regulatory, contractual and statutory requirements including those within the Academy Trust Handbook. • Safeguards and promotes the welfare of children and has regard to any guidance on safeguarding issued by the Secretary of State. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree annual operating plan and budget for the trust, that deliver on the trust strategy. • Agree metrics and process by which progress will be assessed.

Theme	Board	CEO	Both
Non-executive leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures a high performing governance structure where trustees and other non-executive leaders have the expertise to fulfil their functions effectively, with representation that reduces biases in decision-making. • Accesses independent insight from internal and external audits, reviews of governance arrangements and other forms of expert advice. • Provides board induction, training and review. • Support effective succession planning by building a pipeline of future trustees and committee members, with a focus on promoting diversity of thought and experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the trustees and other non-executive leaders to meet their duties, working to ensure operational compliance and fulfilment of all statutory responsibilities. 	
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversees strategic relationships with external stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates trust's strategy, plans and achievements to stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve parents, schools, communities and, where appropriate, dioceses and other religious authorities so that decision-making is supported by meaningful engagement.



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