

Further information

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THE SCHOOLS NETWORK™

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What is an Academy?

Between 2001 and 2010, there was only one kind of academy. This was usually a secondary school (a small number were all-through) that had been closed by the authorities, usually in response to low attainment figures and judgements made by Ofsted, and re-opened as a new legal entity. A sponsor (sometimes a partnership of 2-3 sponsors) was brought in, the principal's post was advertised, staff were transferred under TUPE and a new governing body was established.

Today, 'academy' is a term used to describe all those state schools which enjoy the benefits of school autonomy and which are accountable directly to the Secretary of State. Broadly speaking, they operate outside the Local Authority framework.

They are subject to different conversion processes and requirements. They include those which are obliged by DfE to become academies and those which choose to do so; they include secondary, as well as primary and special schools; they include University Technical Colleges, Studio Schools and Free Schools.

The following is a very brief overview to clarify the key characteristics of each kind of academy.

Freedoms for all academies:

- freedom from local authority control
- ability to set pay and conditions for staff
- freedom from following the National Curriculum
- ability to change the lengths of terms and school days
- freedom to deploy the LACSEG (the LA 'top slice')



What is an Academy?

Sponsored academies

- The government's intervention strategy of choice; almost all predecessor schools have been low attaining secondary schools, usually in urban areas of high deprivation
- All academies are independent, state-funded schools, with greater freedom to make curriculum and financial decisions, but with no additional funding
- Most established sponsored academies share some common characteristics:
 - sponsors
 - new leadership
 - new governance
 - new legal status
 - new name
 - new uniform
 - sometimes a new building
- they have 4 key objectives:
 1. Raising standards
 2. Developing innovative practices
 3. Working in partnership with business, community groups and local schools
 4. Contributing to community regeneration
- The number will continue to grow. Criteria for identifying new sponsored academies, to be applied to primary, secondary and special schools:
 1. Attainment is low and pupils progress poorly
 2. Ofsted judge the school to be eligible for intervention or merely satisfactory
 3. There is a record of low attainment over time
 4. Pupils in secondary schools achieve poorly compared to schools with similar intakes

What is a chain?

An academy chain is where two or more schools apply in a formal partnership to convert to academy status. Being part of a chain enables schools to benefit from the freedoms of academy status, work together to share expertise and services and so increase value for money and improve standards. A federation is the name sometimes given to one of the models of academy chain; schools can have their own or shared Academy Trust and Governing Body.

Converter academies

- Every school can choose to become an Academy, provided that strong performers work in partnership with others to raise standards.
- No Headteacher recruitment; staff TUPE across under the same terms & conditions
- Schools not rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good with Outstanding Features' by Ofsted can now apply but need to demonstrate favourably:
 1. Exam performance over last three years
 2. Comparison with local and national performance
 3. Latest Ofsted findings re 'capacity to improve', 'outcomes' and 'leadership'
 4. Any other matters that the school may rely on to demonstrate that it is performing well

Free Schools

- Free Schools are academies which are entirely new to the state sector – they are either new schools or independent schools becoming state schools
- Free Schools must be set up in response to demand from parents – groups applying to set up Free Schools must submit a petition from parents with children of relevant ages for the particular school they wish to found
- The groups which set up Free Schools vary widely – from groups of teachers, to existing academy sponsors, existing schools and parents. What unites them is a desire for a new high quality school
- The vast majority of groups applying to set up free schools are either a) setting up schools in areas of deprivation and underperformance or b) setting up schools in areas where there are not enough school places
- Like other academies, Free Schools can innovate from the National Curriculum and set their own pay and conditions for staff
- Like other academies, Free Schools are held to account through Funding Agreements which set out their financial responsibilities and expectations of performance

Studio Schools

- An existing school cannot convert to a Studio School, but can choose to sponsor a new one
- Studio Schools are a new type of small (around 300 places) state school for 14–19 year olds
- They are designed to be comprehensive in ability ranges, but are aimed at those who will achieve their full potential through project based learning
- All Studio Schools will provide the national curriculum with particular emphasis on English, Maths, and Double Science
- Post-GCSE qualifications will be determined by each Studio School
- Employability skills will be developed both through project based learning, and paid work placements

University Technical Colleges

- An existing school cannot convert to a UTC, but can choose to sponsor a new one
- University Technical Colleges are a new concept in education. They offer 14–19 year olds the opportunity to take a highly regarded, full time, technically-oriented course of study
- They are set up as academies, with the same powers as Free Schools. Proposals are judged against a set of criteria, which can be found on the DfE website
- They are equipped to the highest standard, sponsored by a university and offer clear progression routes into higher education or further learning in work
- Lord Baker, Chair of the Baker-Dearing Educational Trust says, "We want to forge a partnership between vocational education and universities, FE colleges and employers"

- The students combine hand and mind to learn in a very practical way, integrating national curriculum requirements with the technical and vocational elements
- The college ethos and curriculum is heavily influenced by local and national employers who also provide support and work experience for students

A Studio School or a UTC?

- Studio Schools and UTCs have much in common:
 - the age range
 - the focus on employer involvement
 - a longer day and year
 - a less traditional pedagogy
 - the offer of meaningful qualifications
 - the intent to produce young people with skills and qualifications which employers require
- UTCs do these things by focussing on technical skills in specific occupational areas, such as engineering or manufacturing
- Studio Schools focus on generic employability skills, although in some cases these will be accompanied by specific technical or vocational qualifications

