

10 facts you need to know about academies

Information intended to dispel some common myths and misconceptions about the academies programme.

Myth

By making every school an academy, education is being privatised.

Fact

Academies are free, state-funded schools which are run by charitable trusts. They cannot be run for profit. Profit-making schools were explicitly ruled out in our manifesto and will continue to be: charity law would expressly prevent this. The school system is not being privatised - instead heads and teachers are being given greater freedom to run their schools.

There are already strict rules in place which prevent individuals and companies profiting from their relationship with an academy, as with local-authority schools, academies cannot sell or change the use of publicly funded school land without government approval. This will not change.

Myth

Academies don't lead to higher standards.

Fact

Evidence from around the world clearly demonstrates that educational performance is improved by giving autonomy to front-line teaching professionals and holding those professionals to account for the outcomes they achieve for young people.

It is not the case that every academy performs better than every local-authority school; but the academy system makes it easier to put in place those factors - better teaching, leadership, curriculums and accountability - that incontrovertibly drive up standards. It better allows underperformance to be tackled when it does occur; and establish a system more likely to lead to long-term improvements in results over the next decade.

Myth

Multi-academy trusts are national, remote organisations that don't give local schools and communities a say.

Fact

Empowering the frontline and moving control away from managers and bureaucrats and directly to the frontline is an effective way of improving performance - holding them to account for the results they achieve, and to much stricter standards of financial propriety than we ever have with local-authority schools. That is exactly what a system where every school is an academy does - providing weaker schools with the expert support they need to

improve and giving the best schools the ability, freedom from meddling, money and power to innovate, build on their success and spread their reach further.

Whereas one-size-fits-all approaches dictated from County Hall gives an impression of local control, in fact, it's academy headteachers and governing bodies that hold direct relationships with the parents they serve and have the power to be much more responsive to their communities. If a parent tries to lobby County Hall for change, they'd have to persuade them to change things for the whole local authority; if the academy is approached, it's their responsibility to make a change at the school the parent cares about.

Myth

All schools will have to join multi-academy trusts.

Fact

Successful, sustainable schools will not be forced to join up in a trust with other schools. As it happens, many academy schools have chosen to join a trust because they can see the benefits. Two-thirds of current academies have chosen to be part of multi-academy trusts.

For weaker schools, that means help from stronger schools; for stronger headteachers, it's an opportunity to play a bigger role in improving standards for more children. But for all schools, including those that are already 'outstanding', it opens up opportunities to learn from others and share resources - for instance a small primary school that wouldn't ordinarily be able to afford their own foreign language teacher can now share that teacher with a group of schools.

And strong schools that choose to come together in a trust can decide how it should be led. But to be absolutely clear - we will never make a successful, sustainable school that is performing well join a trust - and successful schools that do choose to set up or join a trust will always be able to decide how it works.

Myth

Academies won't be accountable to parents.

Fact

We want parents to be more involved in their child's education - not less. We are not, and never have suggested parents should no longer sit on governing boards and we know that many parents already play a valuable role in governance, and parents will always be encouraged to be governors or trustees.

Many parents have skills that make them very effective governors. All boards are and will continue to be free to appoint them as they see fit. But we want to enable academies to move from a model where parents are elected or appointed to governing boards for means of representation to one where they are chosen for their expertise.

That means that academy trust boards should be able to appoint all their trustees for their skills, insight and knowledge rather than who they represent.

Our [white paper](#) outlines a range of ways we are enabling parents to be more engaged with their children's education. For the first time we will create an expectation that every academy puts in place arrangements for meaningful engagement with all parents, and to listen to their views and feedback. We will also introduce more regular surveys of parental satisfaction with schools and display this alongside their examination results in our league tables.

Myth

Academies will be forced to cut all ties with the local authority.

Fact

Schools will still be able to work closely with good local authorities as most academies already choose to do. The difference is that the arrangements will be determined locally and driven by headteachers deciding what works for their school, rather than functions and responsibilities designed in Whitehall.

Schools will also be free to group together to buy services from local authorities as is already the case - it's just that they will also have the choice of other services and providers that may be better for their particular needs. For example, the local authority and some of their schools may decide to continue working together to offer HR and facilities-management services, but decide that school improvement is better delivered through small 'families' of schools working together with no need for the local authority.

We've set an end-point in 6 years' time, giving heads and teachers certainty over the future of their schools and a clear sense of direction, so that they can plan effectively to give schools and local authorities time to carefully design arrangements that work locally, rather than an ad hoc approach that schools and local authorities were telling us wasn't helping them plan.

What it does mean is the end of the local-authority monopoly on running schools and central government deciding a single approach to what services are delivered, where: schools will now be required to make a conscious choice over what will work best for their pupils. While there are well run local education authorities, there are also some local authorities that have been allowing schools to underperform, coast or fail for a long time.

Myth

Academies aren't transparent.

Fact

Academies are actually much more accountable than local-authority schools. Academy performance is monitored directly by regional school commissioners who intervene promptly in instances of underperformance.

The Education Funding Agency ensures compliance with a funding agreement to make sure that spend is securing better outcomes for pupils. Unlike local-authority schools, academies are regulated charities - so they prepare annual financial statements that are fully audited by an independent external auditor. Academy schools are all charities held to account through a contract with government and bound by both company and charity law. That contract enshrines their freedom, and keeps them accountable for their results.

Like all schools, the performance of every academy is completely transparent on Ofsted's website and DfE's performance tables. The latter have been re-designed to be easier to navigate and compare performance. We will also publish new academy trust-level performance tables each year.

Myth

Becoming an academy will mean my good school has to change.

Fact

Converting to an academy will not mean that a school that is performing well has to change its teaching practice or headteacher, or any of the things that make that school good. If new academies decide to opt into arrangements that look similar to those that currently work for them - working in the same local family of schools, choosing to fully follow the national curriculum and opting to work closely with the local authority, they're free to do so.

The difference is that we're asking them to make a conscious choice as to what to opt into; and we'll be more able to hold them to account for the effectiveness of their decisions, to continue driving up standards for their pupils. We have seen that even schools that are 'good' or 'outstanding' continue to do well an academy - 2015 GCSE results show that secondary converter academies are performing 7.2 percentage points above the national average, with 64.3% of pupils achieving 5 or more good GCSEs, including English and maths.

Academy status frees the best heads and teachers to innovate, to raise the bar and to do what it takes to compete with the best schools not just in the UK but across the world.

Myth

Converting will be a bureaucratic and financial burden to schools.

Fact

We will ensure these new freedoms don't become a bureaucratic burden and will make the process of converting to an academy simpler. We have given schools a 6-year timetable to become an academy, so no school has to rush into an arrangement that isn't right for them and we will support small schools through this process.

The policy is fully-funded, offering the same academisation grants that have so far seen two-thirds of secondaries and one-fifth of primaries successfully become academies.

We have set aside funding to support a high-quality, fully academised school system. Overall, we have over £500 million available in this Parliament to build capacity - including recruiting excellent sponsors and encouraging the development of strong multi-academy trusts.

Criticisms that the policy is not fully-funded use grossly inaccurate costings, for example, in one case, erroneously calculating the average cost of academisation will be £66,000. This is crude and highly misleading - costs per academy have fallen significantly over the 5-year period, from over £250,000 in 2010 to 2011 to around

£32,000 in 2015 to 2016. The cost per academy will continue to fall significantly in the years ahead as we move towards full academisation.

Myth

There is no longer a role for the local authority in schools.

Fact

The local authority will still play a key role making sure that education provision in their area is of the highest quality.

Rather than running schools, local authorities will instead play a role in ensuring the system works for parents, focused on ensuring there are enough school places, overseeing admissions complaints and commissioning support for children with specific needs, especially those with SEN. We want them to be an advocate for parents and encourage the best multi-academy trusts into their communities and encourage high-quality free school applications.

Alongside this, the opportunities provided by local devolution give local authorities the chance to act as champions and advocates for the education their community wants and deserves.

Document information

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/10-facts-you-need-to-know-about-academies>