

Q & A:

Federations

School Structures



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Questions and Answers on Federations

March 2016

This is the second edition of NGA's federations Q&A. If you are an NGA member and have questions about federations that we have not answered here; please send your questions to federations@nga.org.uk, as we will be updating this briefing if we receive additional questions.

This Q & A briefing is aimed at maintained schools that are considering their future as part of the task of setting their vision for the school, reviewing their structure, and in particular thinking of federating with another school or schools.

If you govern in an academy, you should be considering the same sort of issues, but the relevant structure for you is a multi-academy trust (MAT); for more information, NGA, our legal partners Browne Jacobson and the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) have produced [Forming of Joining a Group of Schools](#) which explores both federations and MATs.

There are numerous benefits of being part of a formal group of schools with joint accountability. It is NGA's view that federations should be considered as part of a school's annual vision and strategy discussion. (See the NGA's, *A Framework for Governance*, produced in partnership with the Wellcome Trust, for more information about strategy and vision-setting.)

NGA has launched *Federation First*, a campaign to raise awareness of federations as an option for school collaboration and improvement. If you would like to talk to an experienced governor who has been through the federation process, email federations@nga.org.uk and we will put you in touch with a Federation Champion.

Question 1: What is a federation?

Answer: A federation is a maintained school structure where a number of schools come together under one governing body. The schools' individual governing bodies are disbanded and a new single over-arching governing body is formed which is the accountable body for all the schools and sets the strategic direction for the group of schools. This is sometimes referred to as a "hard federation" as opposed to a "soft" one, which is in effect a collaboration; we do not use these terms as they can cause confusion.

Federation is not to be confused with collaboration which is a less formal arrangement, where the governing bodies remain separate but establish a joint committee(s) for a specific purpose.



Confusingly some academy chains are also referred to as federations but these are established under a different legal framework and are technically multi-academy trusts (MATs). The principle of governance is similar: one board governing a group of schools.

Question 1b: What is the difference between a federation and an amalgamation?

Answer: An amalgamation involves the closure of one or more of the participating school(s), resulting in one school overall. In a federation, although there is only one governing body, the schools in a federation still exist as separate legal entities and continue to have individual delegated budgets (see question 6) and admission arrangements. The individual schools have different names, and will appear separately in the performance tables. They may be inspected at the same time by Ofsted, but will have their own individual Ofsted reports.

Depending on the schools that are involved in the proposals to work together, an amalgamation could be more appropriate than a federation. A good example might be an infant and a junior school that are situated close to each other, even in many cases sharing a site. This is carried out under a different legal process to federation and indeed may not be entirely within the control of the governing body of either school. Furthermore, an amalgamation will lead to the schools having a unified delegated budget, which results in less funding than were schools to remain separate entities under a federation.

Question 2: What are the benefits of setting up or joining a federation?

Answer: There is a reasonable body of evidence to show that working in a federation with another school has advantages for all parties and, most importantly, for the pupils. Federations are able to provide a better offer to pupils; a broader curriculum and extra-curricular activities. It can also provide improved teaching and learning, in some cases through more specialised staff, but also as a result of strong leadership and staff CPD (continuing professional development) across the federation.

In September 2011, Ofsted produced a [report](#) on federations¹ and found a number of benefits gained by schools federating. It was found that achievement and behaviour had improved in all the federations visited and this was especially true when a weaker school had federated with a stronger one. Furthermore, federation was seen to aid staff retention and development, providing more opportunities for staff to gain experience in different types of school, and/or more progression opportunities. The Ofsted report also highlighted that when a weaker school and a stronger one federate, governance is improved across the federation as governors are able to share best practice

¹ *'Leadership of more than one school – An evaluation of the impact of federated schools,'* Ofsted, September 2011 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/leadership-of-more-one-school>



and experience. [Research](#)² commissioned by the National College of Teaching and Leadership supports these findings, and in particular found that federation can have a positive effect on pupil outcomes.

More recently the NGA's own small scale research in 2013 confirmed these drivers of federation. The full research report can be found on the [NGA website](#) and there is also further information to be found in the [March/April 2013 edition of *Governing Matters*](#) and page 12-13 in the [July/August 2013 edition](#). NGA's research into federations found that improvement in staff retention was also true in relation to headteachers, many of whom said that they would have moved on had the federation not materialised as it provided extra challenge. Federating can also improve the back-office functions by allowing schools to share staff, for example, a business manager who may be unaffordable in a single entity. Although based on a small sample, two thirds of the schools involved in this research had received higher Ofsted grades following federation, with the remaining third receiving the same grade as prior to federating.

A federation may mean that the schools are able to provide a wider curriculum offer to all the pupils in the federation, particularly in the case of small schools who might otherwise not have the resources for such a provision. Any cost savings that are made in the administrative and business development provision across the schools can also be reinvested in the teaching provision. For example as a primary school there might be the option to share a modern languages teacher or a teacher who has specialism in teaching coding, presenting opportunities for pupils to study subjects that might otherwise not be financially viable for the school to provide. There may also be potential savings from joint working that could be realised over time.

There may be other equally valid and valuable reasons for becoming a federation beyond those stated here. Justification can arise from anything and will be specific to the circumstances of the schools and what they seek to gain for the pupils. However, whatever the initial prompt for federation it needs to be clearly understood that the federation is a single entity and all the schools within it must share a vision and purpose. See question 5 for further detail.

Question 3: Should we federate?

[Ofsted's 2011 report](#) looked at; the reasons for federating, the barriers to federating and the success measures. The three most common reasons for federating were:

- One of the schools was causing concern and the federation was formed to aid school improvement

² 'A study of the impact of school federation on outcomes', National College for Teaching and Leadership, August 2011 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-study-of-the-impact-of-school-federation-on-student-outcomes>



- For small schools in danger of closure; to protect the education of the pupils in the community
- To establish a cross phase federations to improve continuity and progress between school phases and reduce the disruption to learning.

NGA's research also found that professional leadership arrangements were a key driver for some schools, specifically where schools were struggling to recruit a new headteacher. The first step towards federation often involved sharing a headteacher as part of a collaboration, which in most cases lead to the schools federating under an executive headteacher (see question 19 for more about executive headteachers).

There are any number of justifications for wanting to federate and these will be specific to the schools that are proposing to do so.

It is one of the three core functions of governance to determine the vision and strategic direction of the school. The starting point should always be; what does the governing body want to achieve and what is in the interests of pupils? Only once the governing body has a clear vision of its end goals can it decide the best route to get there. When considering what you want/need to achieve, you will of course begin from the school's current position and its self-evaluation, but you should also consider the education of future pupils and more widely of the children of the local area and the school's role in school-to-school improvement. This will include a number of ways of working with other schools and federation may be relevant as a route to help deliver better outcomes for children overall.

Once the governing body has an idea of what the school plans to achieve, both in the long and short term, the governing body can consider whether federating with another school would be an end to achieving these aims, and if so, what sort of school they would need to federate with; if they do not have one in mind already. Ideally, the school would have an idea of any schools they could feasibly federate with when considering whether to do so. This would usually be a school that they have worked with before, perhaps as a formal collaboration (see question 1).

The NGA recommends that governing bodies set up a working group to examine federating. The working group will, where relevant, look at the various other forms of co-operation and bring recommendations back to the full governing body. This group should consider the advantages and disadvantages of federation, whom they are proposing to federate with and the process for doing so. It should produce a written report, possibly with recommendations, for consideration by the full governing body. Where the school has a federating partner in mind, the working group should be a collaborative effort and should consist of members of both governing bodies.

This should be carried out alongside an informal process of liaising with the other schools, getting to know their ethos and approach, and developing a positive working relationship. Furthermore,



the informal process of consulting with stakeholders about their views on the situation should begin at this early stage to ensure that any decision to take more formal action would arise from a thorough understanding of the situation (see question 7). The NGA report, [Road to Federation](#), found that one of the most significant barriers to successful federation was a lack of understanding by the relevant parties of what its purpose was, and good communication between schools so stakeholders is crucial to tackling this.

Question 4: Who should we federate with?

The governing body should look at which schools they might wish to federate with and consider what this would bring both their school and the other schools exploring federation, but most importantly what it would bring for their pupils (see question 2 for potential benefits). Schools should have shared intentions for federating in terms of what they hope to achieve; this will help to ensure that all the schools are working towards the same ends (see also question 5; '*Shared vision*').

Locality is important to consider when deciding which other schools to approach to be part of the federation. Practically speaking it's going to be more difficult to gain some of the benefits of federating, such as sharing resources, if there is a large geographical distance between the schools. The rule of thumb according to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, Lord Nash, is that you should be able to get to the other federated school within half of a lunch break.

The phase of schools should be considered. While many federations involve schools that are in the same phase, cross phase working can also have its advantages. This decision comes back to what the governing body hopes for pupils will gain from federating.

The type of school that you are federating with may also have to be considered. If the school has a religious character that is different to your own school's then the relevant diocese or religious body may have a policy on whether this is permitted. Even where the relevant religious authority does not prevent such an arrangement, it does provide an additional complication if one school has a religious character and the other doesn't. There are examples of successful federations of this type, but it does require serious consideration and may impact upon the constitution of the federation governing body. See question 13 for more information.

Early conversations should take place with any school that the governing body wish to federate with to ensure that both (or all) schools are sufficiently interested and willing to begin considering forming a federation.

Question 5: What things should the governing body consider when investigating whether to federate?

Conduct due diligence



It is vital that all the governing bodies considering federation conduct due diligence on each other. Due diligence is the process by which you evaluate and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the school(s) you are thinking of federating with; this should include both educational and financial performance. Failure to carry out due diligence can result in the collapse of a federation. In one example from NGA's research, a federation suffered an early dissolution when one of the schools went into special measures and was then converted into an academy. Its partner in the federation had not realised that performance standards at the other school were so weak. This demonstrates the importance of gaining the entire picture of the school that you wish to federate with. This does not mean that schools must have similar performance standards for a successful federation, but you do need to have full understanding of the situation.

Even in situations where a stronger school is federating with a weaker school, governing bodies should note that the weaker school will almost certainly have some strengths, from which the stronger school can learn. The improvement will be two-way, but there must be capacity within the planned federation to support improvement.

Shared vision

This is the most important factor in the success or failure of any federation. Whatever the original reason for considering federation, it cannot be stressed too much that there needs to be a single vision for the federation. Be clear from the outset what the schools want to try to achieve across the federation and what the schools would want the strategy of any resulting federation to look like, emphasising the need for the full cooperation and participation of all the schools involved in order to achieve the end goal. The schools that make up the federation will need to cooperate and act upon what is best for the federation as a whole and this will be less achievable where the commitment to federation is not shared by all the schools; for example, where smaller schools have federated in order to stay open, but still think in 'individual' terms rather on federation terms.

Staffing structure

The consideration of federating may have been triggered by one school losing its headteacher but this isn't the limit of staff sharing that can make federation attractive. Schools may be able to share teaching staff for those subjects that may not warrant a full-time teacher being employed in the school were it a separate institution. (See question 2 for more detail.)

Many federations move to an executive head model (See question 19), with one headteacher across the schools in the federation, or sometimes across some, but not all of the schools. This can offer advantages, especially to smaller schools who might otherwise struggle to recruit a headteacher on their own. It can also be useful in ensuring that the governing body's vision for the federation is implemented across the federation.



The governing body should think about areas where the school lacks staffing capacity or expertise to assess whether federating would be able to assist with this.

Question 6: What are the funding implications of being part of a federation?

The local authority can choose to either give each school within the federation its own delegated budget share or allocate the funding to the federation as a whole. [The School and Early Years Finance Regulations](#) require that even where the local authority chooses to allocate funding to the federation as a whole rather than the individual schools, the total funding should add up to the same as the individual schools would have received in their own right. The federation governing body is free to spend the money across the federation, although an audit trail must be kept for each individual school budget.

Question 7: What is the formal process for becoming part of a federation?

If a school decides to form or join a federation then there is a formal legal process set down in regulations which it must follow.

The NGA thinks that there should be a stage before this in which the governing body considers its options. This has been explained in detail in questions 3, 4 and 5, but to summarise; it would be best for the school to form a working group in order to explore the feasibility and implications of federating before any formal process takes place. This would also assist in the establishment of working relationships with potential federating partner schools.

NGA also suggests that before commencing the formal process of federating, an informal consultation should take place among the stakeholders; parents, staff, possibly pupils and any other bodies who may be affected (e.g. the local authority or diocese). The purpose of this is to address any concerns of those with an interest in the school so that this can be taken into account before any formal decision is taken. This is the governing body's opportunity to make the case for federation. A formal proposal to federate is much more likely to be well received if the governing body has communicated its plans beforehand and taken the time to allay any concerns which may be raised.

Once these informal steps have taken place, the formal process can commence in line with the School Governance (Federations) Regulations 2012 regulations as follows:

Formal Steps

1. **Written report** – A formal report based on the findings of the working groups and the preliminary informal consultation and discussion with the other schools should be produced. As well as setting out the pros and cons of federation, the report should include practical considerations such as a timetable for implementation and examples of governing



body structure. There must be sufficient detail for the governing body to make an informed decision about whether to progress with the idea.

2. **Formal Governing Body Meeting** – All the governing bodies considering federating must hold formal, separate meetings, to discuss the issues and take a vote on whether to give preliminary consent to progress with the federation.
3. **Notification** – Once the governing bodies have decided to proceed then they must publish a formal proposal of their intention. Questions 9 and 10 set out what this proposal must include and who it must be sent to.
4. **Consultation** – Regulations require that the governing bodies allow six weeks from the publication of proposals for interested parties to make representations about the proposals.
5. **Response** – After the consultation, any responses should be considered jointly by all the governing bodies involved and any amendments made if necessary.
6. **Governing body decisions** - Each governing body should then decide whether to proceed to form the federation or to withdraw at this point.
7. **Formal notification** – If a decision is taken to proceed then any relevant local authority should be informed. The schools will then begin to start the implementation, looking at staffing, buildings and the appointment and election of governors.

Question 7b: Should we hold an additional governing body meeting to discuss the issue?

Yes. The NGA would recommend that as deciding to federate is an important decision for each school, all of the governing bodies should hold an additional meeting to discuss the proposals in full.

Question 8: What are the costs of the process, will we get help and do we need a lawyer?

There is generally no need for you to use a solicitor to become a federation, but if staff terms and conditions may be affected then NGA strongly advises you to seek professional Hr advice. Your LA may be able to help you with the process and GOLD members of NGA can contact the NGA advice team for advice on federating, by either phoning 0121 237 3782 or by emailing GOLD@nga.org.uk.

NGA's Consultancy and Training team have experience of working with Federations, and offer bespoke consultancy sessions to help schools explore their options. For more information, email training@nga.org.uk.

Question 9: What must the proposals include?



The proposals must contain the following:

- the name or names of the governing body(ies) with which the governing body propose to federate and confirmation that that/those governing body(ies) agree with the proposal to federate;
- the proposed size of the governing body of the federation;
- the proposed number of governors for each category of governor;
- the proposed arrangements for staffing the schools within the federation;
- the proposed federation date;
- the identity of the admission authority or authorities for the schools within the federation;
- the date, not less than six weeks after the publication of the proposals, by which written representations may be made to any governing body regarding the proposals and the address to which they should be sent; and
- such other matters as the governing bodies consider appropriate.

Question 10: Who must we send the proposals to?

Governing bodies proposing to federate must publish the proposals by sending them to:

- the Secretary of State;
- the relevant local authorities;
- the head teacher of each school;
- in the case of any school with a foundation - the foundation governors; and the trustees of any trust relating to the school;
- any appropriate diocesan authority in the case of a Church of England or Roman Catholic Church school, or the appropriate religious body in the case of any other school;
- all staff paid to work at any of the schools;
- every person known to them to be a parent of a registered pupil at any of the schools; and
- such other persons as the governing bodies consider appropriate.

A copy of the proposals must be made available for inspection at all reasonable times at each school.

Question 11: What is the role of the local authority (LA) in federating?

The LA's role in federation is mainly to assist in bringing schools together and being able to offer advice and assistance to the schools in their area. Often it will be the LA that has the wider knowledge of the schools that may be interested in some sort of group working and their advice



should be sought at an early stage in the process by governing bodies considering federation as an option.

The LA will receive the proposals for federation and can feed back to the governing bodies about any thought it has on the proposal. However, there isn't a requirement or role for the LA in approving the federation, so although their view has to be sought, it is up to the governing bodies to decide what to do following the publication of the proposals and consideration of the responses.

The LA has the same role after federation as it has with any maintained schools. It may well be the employer of some of the staff (depending on the types of schools in the federation) and it will have to approve any change to the instrument of government that the governing body proposes. Where the federation contains schools that cover more than one LA area, the governing body of the federation must decide which LA is to make the instrument.

Question 12: How long will the process take?

The formal consultation must last for a minimum of six weeks, but this is only one part of the process. The investigatory work and informal consultations may take much longer and will depend upon the number of issues that the governing bodies have to work through before being able to federate. See question 5 for more information about conducting due diligence in relation to federating.

Question 13: Our school is foundation/voluntary school, does this change anything?

Although the overall process is the same as any other school, the consultation process requires the diocese, religious or trust body to be consulted. Different religious bodies and dioceses have different approaches to federations with some only being in favour of federations with other schools under the same diocese.

The Catholic Education Service, which is the body responsible for acting on behalf of the Catholic Bishop's Council in supporting Catholic education in England, stipulates that voluntary aided (VA) Catholic schools cannot federate formally with other categories of school because it would lead to a reduction in the number of foundation governors on the board.

The Church of England also cite the implications of federation on the school foundation as a concern for their VA and voluntary controlled (VC) schools, and emphasises the need for such schools to consult with their local Diocesan Education team when considering such a process. In the NGA's research, two of the federations had a mixture of church and non-church schools. In the first example, the Diocese had been supportive of the idea, but in the second the Diocese had objected to the school federating with other non-church schools but had been overruled by the majority vote of the governing body. This latter school had been VC and thus had a minority of foundation



governors. Different Dioceses have different approaches to federation and so if you are considering federating and have a religious ethos, you should get in touch with your Diocese from an early stage.

If you are a school with a religious character that has federated, or is proposing to federate with other schools, either with or without a religious character, please do let us know your experiences of doing so by emailing federations@nga.org.uk.

Question 14: How will our governing body change if we become a federation?

The existing governing body will cease to exist when the federation comes into effect. Federations only have one governing body for all the schools and this governing body has a minimum of seven governors. The types of governors required are determined by the types of school that are federating. If a number of schools are federating then there may need to be a significant reduction in the total number of governors. It is inevitable that some governors may have to step down, as the federation governing board should have a limited size, ensuring the efficiency of the board and that all governors have a role and contribute something.

A governing body of a federating school must have the following types of governors:

- At least 7 governors in total.
- Two parent governors from across the schools in the federation;
- The headteacher of each school in the federation unless they stand down in accordance with regulation 19 of the School Governance (Constitution) Regulations 2012 (or executive headteacher where applicable);
- One staff governor; and
- One local authority governor.

The federated governing body may also co-opt as many governors to the board as they see fit, although the number of governors who are employed at the schools must not constitute more than a third of the governing body.

There are additional requirements for foundation and voluntary schools, detailed below.

Federations comprising **only** of:

- Voluntary controlled schools – at least two foundation governors but no more than one quarter of the governing body



- Voluntary aided schools – such number of foundation governors to outnumber all the other governors by up to two
- Foundation or foundation special schools which do not have a foundation – at least two foundation governors, but no more than one-quarter, partnership governors
- Foundation or foundation special schools with a non-qualifying foundation – at least two, but not more than 45%, foundation governors
- Qualifying foundation schools – such number of foundation governors so as to outnumber all the other governors by up to two.

Where there is a **mix** of schools the requirements are:

- Voluntary controlled and community, community special or maintained nursery schools – at least one foundation governor
- A governing body that consists of more than one category that includes at least one foundation, foundation special or voluntary aided school – at least two foundation governors, or in the case of foundation schools without a foundation, partnership governors

Question 15: How do we decide which governors will be appointed to the governing body?

It is important that those governors comprising the new federation governing body remember that they are responsible for all schools within the federation and not the school they were formerly a governor at.

The governors that go on to compose the federation governing board should be chosen based upon the skills that they can contribute to the board's functions (see the NGA's [skills audit](#) for more information). The minimum requirements that the School Governance (Federations) Regulations 2012 are detailed in question 14.

For good practice when considering the size and composition of your governing body, see [NGA's Q & A on Constitution](#).

Question 16: Will we have to change the name of our school?



No, there is no requirement to change the school's name, although you may want to consider it as part of the consultation process.

Question 17: Do we need a new instrument of government for the federation?

The instrument of government is the document that specifies the size of the federation governing body and number of governors in each category. As a new federation governing body will be formed there does need to be a new instrument of government. All local authorities that the schools sit in must be sent a copy of the document.

Question 18: How do staffing contracts work in federated schools?

Often schools entering federations retain their staffing arrangements; however, it is possible in federations to request staff to work across the whole federation and this can be one of the advantages, particularly where a number of small schools federate. NGA strongly advises that schools should obtain professional HR advice before seeking to amend contracts for staff to work across the federation.

Where the federation comprises different categories of schools then the governing body need to be mindful of its differing employer responsibilities. In community and voluntary controlled schools the local authority is the employer with the governing body exercising employer responsibilities, whereas in foundation and voluntary aided schools the governing body is the employer. So in practice what does this mean? If the governing body wish members of staff to work across the federation or to include the flexibility for them to do so in the future, the staff members can be contracted to one school with a clause that they can be required to work in other schools within the federation.

Question 19: What is an executive head and do we need one?

An executive head is a headteacher who operates across more than one school and often all of the schools in the federation. The executive headteacher may be the designated headteacher for all the schools in the federation or each school may have a head of school, who is the designated headteacher.

Federations can function without an executive head, although it is worth noting that in [Road to Federation](#), all of the federations interviewed had an executive headteacher. In federations with more than two schools, the governing body may find it harder to hold the leadership to account, especially in regards to responsibilities and cross-federation projects. Without an executive head, the governing body will have to performance manage a number of headteachers.

It is up to the federated governing body to decide whether an executive head would suit their needs. It is important that this is discussed when initial consideration of federating takes place; in



some cases the point of federation may be where a small school has lost a headteacher and so the answer may be simple. In other cases, where each school has its own headteacher, the potential for them to lose their job may be a legitimate concern for them, and the schools proposing to federate should be as open about this as possible.

An executive headteacher will usually be better placed to drive forward the aims of the federation, providing coherency and direction. Alternatively, maintaining separate headteachers for the different schools in the federation may allow schools to maintain a sense of autonomy and individuality if these are important factors for them.

NGA is conducting a research project on the role of executive headteachers. For more information, see the [NGA website](#).

Question 20: Can we expand the federation at a later date?

Yes. Any school wishing to join a federation would have to apply to the federation governing body for preliminary consent to join the federation. Assuming that preliminary consent is given by the federation governing body, the process is the same as that outlined in answer to question 7.

Question 21: Can we convert to become a multi-academy trust?

Yes. If the governing body of the federation wanted to, all the schools could convert to become a multi academy trust as long as at least one of the schools in the federation is 'performing well'. If this was not the case then the federation schools would have to join an established academy trust or join with another maintained school that was deemed to be performing well. As with any structural decision, the governing body would have to be clear of the educational benefits for such a decision. For more information on multi-academy trusts, take a look at the NGA's document, [Leading and Governing Groups of Schools](#), in association with ASCL and Browne Jacobson.

Question 22: Does the NGA have any examples of federations that we could look at?

NGA's Federation Champions are experienced governors who have been through the federation process and have volunteered to be available to talk to members over the telephone, providing a breakdown of the process and discussing any concerns which members may have.

A number of federation governors have written about their federation in [Governing Matters](#) which can be found on the NGA website. NGA has also conducted some research into the formation of federations and multi-academy trusts and the experiences that governors have had in going through the process. You can read the final research paper, which includes practical advice from those who have gone through the process, [on the NGA website](#).

Question 23: What are the issues which prevent a federation from starting up and how do we overcome them?



As with any major organisational change, there are potential problems that it is important to bear in mind when planning to federate with other schools.

Stakeholder concerns

Concerns from parents, pupils and staff were identified as the main stumbling block to federating by both Ofsted and NGA. As such, it is important that the rationale for the change along with the actual and potential impact on staff, parents and pupils are fully explained at an early stage. Effective communication with all stakeholders is vital in order to address any preliminary concerns. Although there is a requirement to conduct a formal consultation, this should be almost at the end of the process; in other words, the first time interested parties hear about the proposal should not be in the formal consultation.

Distance and geography

Logistical issues can sometimes cause problems either in terms of geography or administration. If there is some distance between the schools in the proposed federation then this can be perceived as a barrier. The schools in the Ofsted report noted that it was not insurmountable, but needed to be factored into pre-federation planning. Indeed in one of the federations the NGA interviewed the schools were almost an hour's journey time apart.

Practical local experience and knowledge of setting up a federation

Most of the federations in NGA's research had sought advice from their LA. The quality of this varied with some LAs having a wealth of experience and others not. As local authorities become more acquainted to federations these problems should become less common. Those with [GOLD membership](#) of the NGA will also be able to ring our advice service for guidance.

Practicalities and integration of differing administrative and management information systems

In addition, some federating schools had different administrative IT systems, which made reporting and streamlining of administration challenging. Furthermore, with the removal of levels, there is a greater variety in assessment and tracking systems between schools. It was generally felt that a single over-arching business manager was a significant aid to administrative and financial efficiency, particularly if that person was a part of the senior leadership team. The NGA recommends that Business Managers should be part of the senior leadership team.

Creation of the federation governing body

Not all the existing governors are likely to transfer to the federation governing body and it is vital to be open about this from the outset. These discussions should be had by the governing body, before



any formal steps are taken towards setting up the federation. Early discussions about the size and structure of the federation are vital (see question 15).

Those existing governors who do not go on to serve on the federation governing body may still have a role to play in a local stakeholder group or could use their knowledge and expertise on another governing body.

Question 24: Can we leave a federation?

Yes, in certain circumstances the federation can either be dissolved or one of the federated schools can be allowed to leave. Federation is entered upon as a permanent arrangement, but occasionally there may be reasons for wanting to change the structure at a later date. This could arise from any number of situations, usually culminating in the federation not constituting what was expected of it, or of a failure to meet the objectives of federating. In practice this is not a frequent occurrence. Depending on whether the federation consists of two or more schools, such a request may have the result of dissolving the federation. The people listed as being entitled to make such a request are:

- (a) two or more governors;
- (b) the parents of at least one fifth of the registered pupils at the relevant school;
- (c) at least two fifths of staff who are paid to work at the relevant school;
- (d) the local authority;
- (e) the trustees of the relevant school; or
- (f) a body entitled to appoint foundation governors to the governing body of the federation.

Any such request must be made in writing and signed by the relevant parties. When such a request is received the governing body of the federation must inform the following parties, within one week:

- (a) all relevant local authorities;
- (b) the head teacher of the federation and the head teacher of each federated school;
- (c) where the relevant school is a foundation or voluntary school with a religious foundation, the trustees of any trust relating to the relevant school and, in the case of a Church of England or Roman Catholic Church school, the appropriate diocesan authority, or the appropriate religious body in the case of all other such schools;
- (d) all staff paid to work at the relevant school;
- (e) every person known by the governing body of the federation to be a parent of a registered pupil at the relevant school; and
- (f) such other persons as the governing body of the federation consider appropriate.



The governing body must then meet to decide whether to dissolve the federation, de-federate one school or not allow the school to leave the federation. In the first two instances the governing body also needs to decide on what date the dissolution or de-federation should take place. The meeting cannot take place before 14 days have passed from the receipt of the original request. Following the meeting the governing body must give written notice of its decision to all those bodies it informed about the original request. In addition, if the governing body decides that a school should be allowed to de-federate then it must also inform the Secretary of State for education.

Question 25: Where can we find more information?

NGA has launched its *Federation First* campaign which aims to raise awareness of federation as an option for school improvement. See www.nga.org.uk/campaigns/federations for more information.

NGA conducted research into federations, with the report, [The Road to Federation](#), released in late 2013. The report looks at what can be gained from federating and practical advice from governors that had gone through the process.

CfBT Education Trust commissioned Robert Hill and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to investigate partnership working in small rural primary schools. The [report covers different types of partnerships and formal arrangements, including federations.](#)

Ofsted produced a report looking at federations in 2011 entitled, [Leadership of more than one school](#), which looked at a number of federations to come to conclusions about the potential benefits. The National College for Teaching and Leadership has also released material on federations, with their most notable one entitled [A study of the impact of federations on student outcomes](#), which looked at the leadership structures of different federations and found that executive head structures outperformed 'traditional' ones in federations.

The National College for Teaching and Leadership released a report last year entitled, [The Governance of Federations](#), which provides information on and examples of federations.

NGA's Consultancy and Training team offers services to help facilitate discussion about federation. For more information, email training@nga.org.uk.