

Bishop Challoner Catholic School

**Questions received from
NEU Members**

Additional Questions received from NEU Members as part of the consultation.

Q1	<p>One of the main reasons given by Governors when taking the decision to convert to academy status is around 'Increased savings and efficiencies at a time of growing financial pressures'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The biggest expense in any school is the staffing costs. Are there any plans to change staffing numbers? b) Have any conversations / exercises taken place to look at current staffing structures with a view to what may be required by the CAT? c) Is the current non-classroom-based staff 'review' of roles at Bishop Challoner being undertaken with a view to future academy requirements? If not, what is the purpose of this review? d) Are similar reviews being undertaken at the other schools proposing to join the MAT/CAT?
A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The school is currently reviewing its staffing requirements in response to the amalgamation of the Boys and Girls schools. Any changes to the staffing structure will be to meet the needs of the number of pupils on role and the curriculum and not related to the school joining the Lux Mundi CAT. b) The proposed CAT will have a small central team of a CEO, CFO, Clerking and Admin. There are no planned changes to the staffing structure in any of the schools as a consequence of joining the CAT. c) The current review of non-classroom-based staff at Bishop Challoner is being led by the school to match the ongoing needs of the school and is not being driven by the CAT. d) The Headteacher and Governing Bodies in all schools' review staffing levels at the end of each financial year to ensure that the staff structure is in line with pupil numbers and budgets for the next financial year. This is not undertaken or imposed by the CAT. Under the agreed Scheme of Delegation this process will continue to be undertaken at school level.
Q2	<p>In late 2021 / early 2022, the pack sent to applicants for the Executive Headteacher role at Bishop Challoner stated 'The vision of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster Diocese is that we will join a Multi Academy trust as part of a family of schools. Discussions and due diligence on all aspects has begun. The successful candidate would be expected to see this through to its completion'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Is this consultation just a case of going through the motions and the outcome to convert already decided? b) The previous headteacher and chair of governors had rejected the idea of academisation. What had a changed between the two headships/leadership to pursue academisation?
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) No, in compliance with the Academies Act (2010) the Governing Body has led a consultation with the school's stakeholders to listen to their views on the Governor's proposal to form the Lux Mundi CAT.

	<p>Governors will review the findings from the consultation and decide whether or not to proceed with the next phase of the project based on a number of considerations.</p> <p>b) The educational landscape has further shifted since 2021. Many Catholic Schools in inner city London face growing threats in terms of declining pupil numbers and growing financial pressures. The Diocese's CAT Strategy asks Schools to join forces and collaborate in a larger more resilient organisation to mitigate these threats to protect, secure and develop Catholic education for future generations.</p>
Q3	<p>Do any of the current Bishop Challoner Governors have links to the other schools proposing to form part of the same MAT /CAT? This could be as part of their governing body or an employee or former employee of Cardinal Pole and the three primary schools. If so, have they declared a conflict of interest and removed themselves from the decision-making process affecting Bishop Challoner?</p>
A3	<p>Some of the current Bishop Challoner Governors serve on the Governing Bodies of other Schools in the Family, and others are part of the Shadow Board of the part of the proposed CAT, as part of their wider commitment to Catholic education.</p> <p>Both the Shadow CAT Board and Project Steering Group (PSG) of Headteachers and Chairs of Governors asks representatives to declare interests at the start of the meeting.</p> <p>The CEO Designate was appointed by the Diocese following a recruitment and interview process and is independent of the schools proposing to form the CAT.</p> <p>Where there is any perceived conflict of interest the Board and PSG follow advice contained in the Academy Handbook which sets out a clear process for handling conflicts of interest, including, where appropriate, removing any individuals with a perceived conflict of interest from the decision-making process.</p> <p>A trained Clerk has been appointed who is able to provide advice on this to the Chair if this arises.</p>
Q4	<p>Do any of the current Bishop Challoner Governors have links to the new CAT /MAT? Will they be serving as a Governor for the trust? If so, have they declared a conflict of interest and removed themselves from the decision-making process affecting Bishop Challoner?</p>
A4	<p>As stated above, the Headteacher and Chair of Governors are members of the PSG.</p> <p>One Bishop Challoner Governor applied and was appointed as a Foundation Director to the Shadow CAT Board. Foundation Governors and Foundation Directors are volunteers and receive no pecuniary benefit from the School or CAT.</p> <p>All representatives are asked to confirm any potential declarations of interest in relation to all schools and other bodies, which are managed as set out above.</p>
Q5	<p>We understand that how the school is funded will not change and that income will remain predominately determined by pupil numbers.</p>

	<p>a) Have the Governors undertaken a financial analysis between staying as VA school versus an academy? What was the outcome of this research? Will it be shared with stakeholders?</p> <p><u>LGPS Liability</u></p> <p>b) We understand that that there are certain expenditure costs that VA schools are not liable for (whereas an academy would be) such as LGPS pensions deficits. Has LBTH been approached recently concerning the LGPS pension liability?</p> <p>c) How much is the current liability of the LGPS that Bishop Challoner would be expected to pay back?</p> <p>In the FAQ document sent to staff it stated, 'With government borrowing already at unprecedented levels, prospects for an increase in school funding in the short to medium terms are extremely low' and 'Governors have conducted a number of activities over several years to ensure we reach the best decision for our school.'</p> <p><u>Top Slice - Funding of central functions</u></p> <p>a) What is the current percentage taken by LBTH as their 'top slice' compared to the percentage proposed to be expensed to schools to fund 'Trust activities'?</p> <p>b) In the FAQ document sent to staff it stated, 'We also believe the time is right in terms of reductions in funding and support from local authorities' (to convert). Please explain how it is necessary to take on increased (potential) unnecessary pension and top slice costs in the current climate.</p> <p>c) What reductions in funding are being referred to?</p>
A5	<p>a) The schools, the Diocese and Regional Directors officer have carried out due diligence exercises and will continue to keep this under review.</p> <p><u>LGPS Liability</u></p> <p>b) Both VA and Academy Schools contribute to the LGPS for support staff. We are in discussion with LBTH about how this might change on conversion to an Academy.</p> <p>c) As (b) above</p> <p><u>Top Slice - Funding of central functions</u></p> <p>a) Most Tower Hamlet services are de-delegated allowing the school to see the cost of services provided from its budget share. The CAT will continue to buy many services from Tower Hamlet where they represent value for money.</p> <p>The Shadow CAT Board continue to work on the top-slice for the CAT and are consulting with schools on which services they seek to align and operate centrally.</p> <p>When this has been agreed the minimum percentage contribution to central CAT budgets will be set to cover these services.</p>

	<p>Whilst finances are important, they are not the only reason schools will benefit from forming CATs. The aim of the CAT Strategy is to protect, secure and develop Catholic Education by creating a resilient structure for Catholic schools to work in partnership and mutual support.</p> <p>b) Both VA and Academies pay employer contributions to meet any LGPS deficits. We are working with LBTH to determine whether the schools' costs will be any different as an Academy.</p> <p>Similarly, the school's contribution to central CAT costs will be offset by contributions it currently makes to LBTH.</p> <p>c) Nationally, Local Authority and school budgets are under acute financial pressure and the range and level of support services LAs provide schools has decreased in recent years.</p>
Q6	<p>The following reference was made in FAQ document 'There are other financial advantages, for example VAT is recoverable on normal business activities and capital works.'</p> <p>a) Does the school not currently claim VAT on normal business activities?</p> <p>b) What would be the impact financially (in £) of VAT claimed back on Capital works?</p>
A6	<p>a) The school is able to reclaim VAT on its normal business activities, but it is currently not able to reclaim VAT on capital works above a threshold limit. Converting to an Academy would allow Schools in the CAT to reclaim 20% on all capital works.</p> <p>b) The financial impact would be 20% of the cost the capital works.</p>
Q7	<p>In the consultation leaflet (10/1/24), circulated to staff on 12/1/24 and 15/1/24, it stated 'The Headteacher and Chair of Governors believe the time is right to move forward after careful consideration and a thoughtful journey'. Will staff have an opportunity to hear and challenge the rationale, arguments and evidence considered by the those making the decision to convert?</p>
A7	<p>Those consultations have already taken place with parents and staff, including a separate meeting at Bishop Challoner with union representatives who then presented their questions at the staff meeting.</p> <p>A summary of comments and questions with responses has been prepared for circulation in repose to the consultation.</p> <p>The decision on whether the school should convert and join the Lux Mundi CAT is a matter for Governors who have thoroughly researched this over a number of years and will decide in the best interests of the future of the school.</p>

