

# Effective MAT governance

## Unit 4 transcript

**Jay:** Thanks for making time to meet with me Jan. As one of our soon-to-be academy committee chairs, I thought it would be helpful if we could talk about this rather than share by email.

**Jan:** It's no problem Jay – it's good to know that you recognise that communicating with governing bodies matters – I mean academy committees!

**Jay:** The issue is that now we've realised that we can't carry on with academy committees operating as maintained school governing bodies. It's become clear that this creates work for the heads – and for you.

**Jan:** This makes sense – we are aware that, in some MATs, heads appear to be reporting to both the academy committee and the CEO.

**Jay:** We've also realised that, as a small MAT, having academy committee chairs as trustees may mean that the board has direct links with the schools...but it isn't working. From my own point of view, by continuing as a local chair I have academy committee meetings to sort, as well as being a trustee, so having trustee meetings to go to too. And now I've discovered that as an original signatory to the memorandum, I am a member as well! So I am swamped with meeting dates and governance commitments, and as I work full time and have a family, nothing is being done well.

**Jan:** I know exactly what you mean – my family were pretty sick of me always doing governance work and so I would have to think very carefully about taking on a dual role.

**Jay:** As is often the case, matters came to a head when we were planning for taking on your school and the two others because it emerged that two of the new schools' chairs assumed they would also be trustees.

**Jan:** But that would make for a huge board!

**Jay:** Exactly. And it keeps the focus on individual schools rather than the trust. And, even more importantly, many of us are becoming increasingly demotivated because of the workload.

**Jan:** Is this why you decided to commission an external review of governance?

**Jay:** Yes. And to be honest the recommendations have been wide ranging, so much so that they have come as a bit of a surprise. But we feel that our consultant explained clearly why we need to do what we need to do, and we effectively have an action plan to work through systematically – although it will take the best part of two terms.

**Jan:** But will it be worth it?

**Jay:** Oh yes. We are going to separate out the role of the academy committee so that the chairs aren't also trustees. This will give us a truly objective trust board, and the academy committees will have a clear remit which will focus on the school. The trust board will be better able to demonstrate that it is fulfilling all our three core governance functions, and will have a scalable structure going forward. The question for you will be to decide if you want to apply for a trustee position, or to carry on.

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### From single school clerking to MATs

I began by clerking a single school – I had family responsibilities and so the part-time nature suited me, but I was immediately hooked as years ago I had started training to be a company secretary until personal circumstances meant I had to change tack.

After I'd undertaken the NGA Leading Governance Development Programme for Clerks (which, by the way, I found really helpful, as it meant I became confident clerking in a MAT setting), I got asked to clerk another school which eventually joined ABCAT.

### Centralisation of clerking

This coincided with the governance review, which recommended centralising clerking to improve coordination, consistency, quality and communications.

### An enhanced clerking role to support governance work across the trust

The trust isn't yet in a position to consider a governance manager and so I suggested the job title Lead Clerk. This was agreed, along with a new job description (the NGA's Clerking Matters resources helped with this) and a very welcome salary review. I am still part time but work enough hours to clerk for the trust board and its committees, also two of the newer academy committees. I employ another two clerks who clerk the other academy committees and who can cover for holiday and sickness. I'm also in charge of all the governance documentation, websites, and induction training for trustees and academy committee members (although I have discovered that one of my other clerks is excellent at delivering training) and I will be arranging the first annual conference which trustees have just agreed the date for. I've also just been finding out if we can get a progress report from the consultant who undertook our external review. I would like to be able to evidence to everyone that has worked so hard to make governance better that we have moved forward a long way. Exciting times