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The Academies programme: Progress, problems and possibilities

A report for the Sutton Trust

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December 2008

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Sutton Trust for the funds which have made this project possible.

We are grateful to the various individuals and organisations who spoke to us about their involvement with the Academies programme. We would also like to thank all the stakeholders who took part in a Roundtable discussion of the issues and for their comments on an early draft of this report. We are particularly grateful to Chris Husbands for his feedback on various drafts and to Nova Matthias for proof reading the report.

Glossary of terms

ACE	Advisory Centre for Education
BSF	Building Schools for the Future
CTC	City Technology College
CVA	Contextual Value Added
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001-2007)
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMC	The Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ISSP	Independent State School Partnerships
NAO	National Audit Office
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NCEE	National Council for Educational Excellence
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NUT	National Union of Teachers
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PMDU	Prime Minister's Delivery Unit
PDS	Professional Development Schools
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SSAT	Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCL	University College London
UCU	University and College Union
VAT	Value Added Tax

Executive Summary

One of the most prominent and controversial aspects of the New Labour government's education policy is undoubtedly the Academies programme. Despite criticisms of the programme, it continues to be a major plank of government education policy. Indeed, the programme's expansion has recently been accelerated, but there have also been significant changes to the policy. There are 130 Academies open with a total of 314 scheduled to be open by September 2010. The government's ultimate target is 400 Academies.

This report draws on a range of relevant literature about Academies to: evaluate the performance of Academies against the original objectives of the initiative; examine some of the significant changes that have occurred to the programme; develop a typology of different models of Academies; look at possible alternatives to Academies; and consider the future direction of the programme and related developments.

Research Findings

Original objectives of the Academies Programme

The original ultimate objectives of the Academies programme were:

1. Academies will contribute to driving up standards by raising achievement levels for their own pupils, their family of schools and the wider community by breaking the cycle of underachievement and low aspirations in areas of deprivation with historical low performance;
2. Academies will be part of local strategies to increase choice and diversity in education. They will have innovative approaches to one or more of governance, curriculum, staffing structures and pay, teaching and learning, structure of the school day and year, using ICT; and
3. Academies will be inclusive, mixed ability school[s].

This report seeks to ascertain how successful the programme has been in fulfilling each of these objectives so far. Its conclusions can be summarised as:

1. With regard to the first objective, the picture is mixed and the evidence not easy to interpret. The average attainment of pupils in Academies has risen but in certain cases their intakes have changed. There are continuing concerns about achievement levels in a number of Academies. The impact of Academies on the attainment of their family of schools and on the wider community has been even more difficult to gauge. While this part of the objective was perhaps too ambitious, little action seems to have been taken to address the issue. The sharing of Academies' facilities was hindered by VAT regulations prior to 2007.
2. Academies have increased diversity in education in the sense they are a distinctive type of state school, though arguably less distinctive now than when they were first launched. The scope for difference and innovation has potentially been curtailed by recent reforms, such as a clearer requirement to follow the core subjects of the National Curriculum.
3. Academies are 'inclusive' in the sense that they currently have twice the national average of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). The picture varies between Academies, but overall the proportion of FSM pupils has fallen since the programme started by 16.3

percentage points. This suggests that Academies are becoming more inclusive in the sense that they are drawing pupils from a wider range of social backgrounds and, in some cases at least, a broader ability range. There has also been concern about the high number of exclusions in some Academies and how these might affect neighbouring schools.

Consideration of the objectives suggests that some aspects of them may have been too ambitious (e.g. helping to raise performance in other schools) and that there has sometimes been a tension between them (e.g. the focus on areas of deprivation and the need to become 'inclusive, mixed ability schools'). In addition, the reliance on Academies in the context of other policies, such as the *National Challenge*, may be inappropriate. For example, in this particular initiative, there is a danger that some existing Academies will fail to reach the required target of 30% of pupils achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including English and maths) within a few years of opening.

Distinctive characteristics and performance of the Academies programme

This report looks at various distinctive aspects of Academies programme, and each are summarised below:

Independence

- A distinguishing aspect of Academy schools can be seen as their **independence from the local authority**. This autonomy was seen as central to facilitating innovation in Academies. Yet this has led to some criticism that Academies are largely unaccountable, and damaging to neighbouring schools. Academies' autonomy has been, to some extent, curtailed by recent reforms. However, whilst this reduction in the autonomy of Academies has been welcomed by some, it has been criticised by others as diluting the original concept.
- **The freedom available to Academy principals has led to instances of visionary leadership in terms of innovation and pedagogy**. However, there is a potential danger that the most talented head teachers will be drawn away from other state schools into Academies. The National Audit Office found that Academy principals are paid on average between £18,000 and £32,000 more than those in the maintained sector.

Sponsorship

- Although there have been sponsors in other types of schools, for example Specialist Schools, **the power of an Academy sponsor is considerable**. This includes the right to appoint the majority of the governing body and having ownership of the estate.

Attainment

- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) records that GCSE attainment has tended to have improved at **a greater rate in Academies than the national average and amongst similar schools**. The National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee evaluations also broadly praised the progress in GCSE attainment in Academies.
- However, rises in achievement have coincided with a decline in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in Academies and there are still considerable concerns about attainment in some Academies. The 2007 GCSE results indicate that the **majority of Academies** (26 out of 36 with results in 2007), including those that have been open for at least four years, **still do not meet the *National Challenge* target of having at least 30% of pupils achieving five GCSEs A*-C (including English and maths)**. Furthermore, only just over half (12 out of the 20 Academies with two years of results in 2007) improved on this measure from the previous year.

Admissions and exclusions

- The programme was originally designed to tackle disadvantage and educational underachievement. A report by *National Foundation for Educational Research* found that **early Academies had a disproportionately high number of pupils eligible for FSM** compared to their local population. However, the composition of Academies appears to have changed over time. The School Census indicates that **the average proportion of pupils eligible for FSM in Academies has declined from 45.3% in 2003 to 29% in 2008**. This is due to both a decline in FSM rates in older Academies and to the fact that many of the Academies that have joined the programme more recently started with lower FSM rates.
- **Exclusions have been quite high in some Academies, and in certain cases this has been at greater levels than in their neighbouring schools**. However, new Academies will be required to participate in ‘behaviour partnerships’ with other local schools, and existing Academies are also being encouraged to do so.

Effects on neighbouring schools

- **PwC find that the decline in FSM pupils in Academies does not appear to have had an adverse effect on the intakes of overlapping intake schools**. However, some critics of the programme remain concerned about the implications of admission and exclusions policies in Academies for neighbouring schools. More recent education policies have tended to place greater emphasis on partnerships between all state schools, including Academies, for example in relation to 14-19 diplomas and behaviour.

Buildings and costs

- Many early Academies had buildings that went over budget. The ***Building Schools for the Future*** policy, with its commitment to refurbish or rebuild every secondary school by 2020, means that **Academies' distinctiveness in having a new build has, to some extent, diminished.**

Specialisms

- **Academies' specialisms tend to focus on a narrow range of subjects.** Of the 83 Academies open by September 2007, just over half (42) had at least one of their specialisms in business and/or enterprise. However, the 47 Academies that opened in September 2008 had a more diverse range of specialisms, with only a third having a specialism in business and/or enterprise.

Changes to the Academies Programme

- **There have been various changes to the programme in the last few years.** These include: more involvement of local authorities; more encouragement of educational sponsors (such as universities and independent schools); and an explicit requirement to follow the National Curriculum in core subjects.

Emerging Models of Academies

- There is **no single model of Academies**, and the **proliferation of different types of Academy** now means that it is becoming difficult to view Academies as a homogenous initiative. Of the many different Academies, the following types frequently occur:
 - an Academy replacing a 'failing' school(s);
 - a new school in an area of educational underachievement;
 - conversions of CTCs and independent schools, and possibly grammar schools in the future;
 - a 'failing' school converting to an Academy as part of the *National Challenge*.
- There are also different types of sponsors. While private sector sponsors were prevalent in early Academies, **public and third sector organisations, such as local authorities, independent schools and universities, are becoming increasingly involved.** These organisations can have the sponsorship fee waived, hence the notion of 'sponsor' has changed. In addition, **'Academy chains' have emerged**, which are organisations, such as United Learning Trust, Oasis, Harris, Absolute Return for Kids and Edutrust, which sponsor a number of Academies. Some of

these newer types of sponsors provide Academies with different characteristics from those in the early waves.

Alternatives to Academies

- It was originally argued that the unique characteristics of Academies were necessary to fulfil the mission set for them by government. **A number of factors suggest that the underlying assumptions of the original policy should now be reassessed and alternatives considered.** These factors include:
 1. Not all Academies currently have these unique characteristics.
 2. More types of school other than Academies show some of these characteristics.
 3. Not all Academies have been successful, despite having these characteristics.
 4. Schools which are not Academies appear to be successful in similar circumstances, despite not having all these characteristics.
- The **creation of Academies is not the only way to achieve the programme's objectives.** The *Building Schools for the Future* programme is committed to refurbishing all schools. Trust schools are a way to work with external partners, and CTCs and Specialist Schools already have the support of sponsors. Finally, other alternative school models, such as Professional Development Schools, could play a part (a Professional Development School seeks to mix university academic expertise with practitioners in schools).

Policy implications

An early draft of this report was discussed with various stakeholders in the Academies programme at a Roundtable event in October. Some of that discussion has informed the following policy implications.

- The controversies surrounding Academies may limit their effectiveness in producing system-wide improvement. **If Academies are to remain an important part of the educational landscape for the foreseeable future, their role in the overall system needs to be clarified.**
- **The government should revisit and refine the objectives of the Academies programme.** Different priorities point to the need for different models of schools. It may be, for example, that existing approaches are ill-suited to improving the performance of neighbouring schools.

- **Academies are likely to have more influence if they co-operate with neighbouring schools** in terms of admissions, exclusions and sharing their resources. The increased collaboration already required in ‘behaviour partnerships’ and the provision of 14-19 diplomas could usefully be extended.
- **Academies’ admissions practices, along with those of all state schools, should be more closely monitored**, especially in terms of the impact they might have on the intakes of their neighbouring schools.
- While banding of admissions has enabled some Academies to become more inclusive, **area-wide banding would ensure that this was not to the detriment of other local schools.**
- In founding Academies, more consultation is needed on **the demand and appropriateness of a particular specialism in the locality**, especially in relation to the provision already available.
- It should be standard practice to have **staff and parent representation on Academies’ governing bodies**, and observance of this should be regularly monitored.
- **The emergence of Academy chains is a potentially important and valuable development.** However, care needs to be taken to ensure that the benefits of school autonomy are not lost by key decisions being taken away from individual schools by the central management.
- Some Academies have used their autonomy to innovate in terms of school leadership, staffing, curriculum and pedagogy. **Their role in sharing good practice could be enhanced by following the model of Professional Development Schools.**
- The **involvement of universities and successful schools as sponsors and co-sponsors** is an important development. It would be advantageous to **extend this type of partnership to other state schools, especially those with traditionally low rates of higher education participation.**
- Academies are in danger of being regarded by politicians as a panacea for a broad range of education problems. Given the variable performance of Academies to date, conversion to an Academy may not always be the best route to improvement. **Care needs to be taken to ensure that Academies are the ‘best fit’ solution to the problem at hand.**
- **There should be more sophisticated use of pupil level data in evaluating the success of Academies.**

- **Comparisons between Academies, and between Academies and other schools, should take more account of differences in, for example:**
 - admissions policies;
 - pupil demographics;
 - performance of the predecessor school;
 - behavioural issues;
 - stability or otherwise of staffing;
 - changes in school leadership.

Introduction

One of the most prominent and controversial aspects of the New Labour government's education policy is undoubtedly the Academies programme. First announced in 2000, there are currently 130 Academies open in England,¹ set to rise to over 314 by 2010, and eventually to 400. They have been characterised in an official prospectus as 'all-ability state schools with a mission to transform education.'² Former schools minister Lord Adonis saw Academies as a movement that could help to transform the whole education system:

If education is indeed to be an engine of accelerated social mobility, then in terms of secondary schools two things need to happen. First, we need to eradicate the long tail of underperforming schools which still exists. And second, we need steadily more secondary schools to move from being satisfactory to excellent, competing at the highest levels of attainment. Academies have a critical role to play on both fronts – the eradication of failure and the quest for excellence.³

Academies were originally developed in order to tackle disadvantage and underachievement. Sponsors contribute money and expertise and help to create innovative approaches to schooling in these Academies. These schools are also expected to instigate improvements in neighbouring schools and the wider community in their locality.

Yet the policy has often been contentious. Many of the early Academy buildings went over budget. Alleged enticement to sponsors was part of a 'cash for honours' row in the final year of the Blair government, while particular sponsors have been accused of bringing controversial religious teaching, such as creationism, into their schools. The schools' independence has led some to see them as unaccountable and unnecessarily separate from local authority provision. On the other hand, the policy has been supported by various organisations, including the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, and some local authorities are now actively participating in the programme.

Aim of the report

This report collates and scrutinises secondary material relating to the Academies programme. A great deal of the literature on Academies is polarised and advocates either a position for or against the programme. This report attempts to cover a wide range of literature on Academies. The objectives of the report are to:

¹ This figure includes the 47 Academies that opened in September 2008 but not the four scheduled to open in January 2009.

² DCSF & DIUS. 2007. *Academies, Trusts and Higher Education: prospectus*. London: HMSO. p. 7.

³ Adonis, A. 2008. 'Academies and social mobility', Speech to the *National Academies Conference* February 7th. http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/software/Andrew_Adonis_Speech_feb08.doc?version=1. Accessed 05/03/2008. p. 11.

- analyse the original aims of the programme and consider how feasible these were, how they might have changed and whether the programme is currently achieving them;
- identify the characteristics of Academies and create a typology of different types of Academies;
- examine the newer types of Academy sponsors (such as universities and independent schools) and consider the implications of this development for the programme;
- outline what alternative initiatives could also fulfil the objectives of the programme.

The report will revisit the original Academies programme announcement to ascertain what it was hoped it would achieve, and draw upon existing evaluations of the performance of Academies to see how far they have met those aspirations. It then reviews some recent changes to the policy and identifies some different models of Academies that are now emerging. In distinguishing between different approaches, it focuses especially on the potential contribution of universities, who are now being encouraged to take a more active role in the programme. It also considers whether that contribution might also be made through other initiatives. The report concludes with an overall review of the effectiveness of the Academies programme to date and how it might be developed in the future.

1. Origins of the Academies programme

The Academies programme was first announced in March 2000 in a speech to the Social Market Foundation by the then Education Secretary, David Blunkett. This new type of school was intended either to replace an existing failing school or to provide a new school in an area of sustained educational underachievement. Blunkett outlined the key facets of the policy:

...in some of the most challenging areas, we believe a more radical approach is needed. Over the next year, we intend to launch pathfinder projects for new City Academies. These Academies, to replace seriously failing schools, will be built and managed by partnerships involving the Government, voluntary, church, and business sponsors. They will offer a real challenge and improvements in pupil performance, for example through innovative approaches to management, governance, teaching and the curriculum, including a specialist focus in at least one curriculum area.⁴

City Academies (the prefix 'City' was dropped when the policy was expanded to non-urban areas) were to have a distinctive identity, and to be something of a 'shock tactic' to improve performance. As the quotation above suggests, this was seen as a distinctive and 'radical' approach to tackling underachievement in schools, using 'innovative' approaches which, by implication, could seemingly not be realised by existing school types.

The size of the programme is now considerable. The first three Academies opened in 2002, and 130 are currently open. The eventual target of 400 (target date unspecified) would constitute just over 10% of all secondary schools in England.

The government has commissioned annual evaluations of the programme by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). In addition, reviews of the programme have been conducted by the National Audit Office (NAO) and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and it has also been scrutinised periodically by (what is now) the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee. Trade unions, such as the NASUWT, TUC, and NUT, and the Anti Academies Alliance, have also commissioned reviews of the programme. The major reviews will be discussed in this report.

Prior to the launch of the Academies programme, a number of other major education initiatives had been developed by Labour since their coming to power in 1997. These include Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, Fresh Start schools and, more recently, the *Building Schools for the Future* (BSF) programme (launched in 2004).⁵ The BSF programme aims to rebuild every state secondary school by 2015, although this has recently been put back to 2020 (even this date may now be in doubt).⁶ This programme will have implications for Academies with regard to the distinctiveness of new school buildings, and this issue will be returned to later in the report.

⁴ Blunkett, D. 2000. *Transforming Secondary Education*. Speech to the Social Market Foundation March 15th. http://www.dfes.gov.uk/speeches/media/documents/transforming_secondary_education.doc. Accessed 12/02/2008, pp. 13-4.

⁵ See: DfES. 2004. *Building schools for the future: A new approach to capital investment*. Annesley: DfES.

⁶ Curtis, P. 2008. 'Ministers shelve £45bn plan to rebuild every state school by 2020', *The Guardian* April 10th. <http://education.guardian.co.uk/newschools/story/0,,2272281,00.html>. Accessed 11/04/2008.

Academies built explicitly upon the City Technology Colleges (CTCs) created by the Conservatives in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In fact, the statutory basis for Academies employed existing legislation used to create CTCs in the 1988 Education Reform Act.⁷ Further similarities with CTCs include the urban location, the specialism and the sponsor. CTCs were themselves based partly on magnet schools in the USA and, like Academies, have many similarities to the charter schools that have since developed in many parts of that country. Yet the programme of CTCs never reached the same scale as Academies. Just 15 CTCs were established with the last created in 1993, four years before the end of the Conservative government and seven years before the launch of the Academies programme. Though small in number, CTCs were referred to by Kenneth Baker (the then Education Secretary) as ‘islands of excellence’ and ‘lights for others to follow’, and Sir Cyril Taylor also emphasised their ‘beacon or lighthouse effect’.⁸

In 2005, in its response to the second PwC evaluation, the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) cited CTCs when attempting to demonstrate that Academies were ‘far from untried or unproven’.⁹ It also stated that ‘[t]he CTC experience is a sound precedent for the Academies Programme, and it was decisive in persuading the government to launch the Academies Programme in 2000’.¹⁰ Yet the DfES response also differentiated the Academies programme from CTCs by claiming that the government was ‘focusing the [Academies] model more specifically and rigorously on areas of deprivation and low inherited educational standards’.¹¹ Similar claims were made at the start of the CTC experiment but neither initiative has entirely stuck to this focus. However, the response also highlighted another key difference: ‘CTCs were also mostly established with opposition from Local Education Authorities (LEAs), whereas every Academy so far established enjoys the support of the relevant LEA’.¹² The extent to which local authorities have actively embraced Academies, or have done so willingly in instances where this has occurred, remains a matter of contention. A distinctive feature of the Academies programme is that the schools are outside of the control of local authorities.

There have been some significant changes in the Academies policy in recent years. This includes the majority of CTCs and a few independent schools converting to Academies. Universities, FE colleges and independent schools are being more proactively encouraged to sponsor Academies, and the requirement that sponsors provide £2 million has been waived in these cases. Significantly, local authorities have now become more actively involved in Academies, in some instances as co-sponsors. This, in particular, is seen by some as a decisive break with the notion of Academies as ‘independent state schools’ offering an alternative to local authority provision. Ed Balls’ first speech to the commons as Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families seemed to embrace local authorities somewhat more than before: ‘[a]ll academies replacing local authorities proceed with local authority

⁷ Rogers, M. and Migniuolo, F. 2007. *A New Direction: A Review of the School Academies Programme*. London: Trades Union Congress. p. 8.

⁸ Whitty, G., Edwards, T., and Gewirtz, S. 1993. *Specialisation and choice in urban education: The city technology college experiment*. London: Routledge. pp. 127-8.

⁹ DfES. 2005. *Department for Education and Skills Response to the Second Annual Report from the PricewaterhouseCoopers Evaluation of the Academies Programme*. Nottingham: DfES Publications. p. 7.

¹⁰ DfES, *Department for Education and Skills Response to the Second Annual Report*, p. 8.

¹¹ DfES, *Department for Education and Skills Response to the Second Annual Report*, p. 7.

¹² DfES, *Department for Education and Skills Response to the Second Annual Report*, p. 8.

endorsement at the feasibility stage now, and there is already a duty to consult local authorities at the funding agreement stage.¹³

With this apparent change in emphasis, and with the continuing controversy surrounding aspects of the programme, it is important to remind ourselves of the Academies programme's original objectives, and which features of the programme were then considered necessary, if not sufficient, to achieve them.

1.1. Original objectives of the Academies programme

A number of texts outline the objectives of the Academies programme. The 2001 Green Paper *Schools: Building on Success*, defined Academies in the following way:

City Academies offer a radical option to help raise achievement in areas of historic underperformance [...] City Academies are all-ability schools with the capacity to transform the education of children in areas of disadvantage and need. They will raise standards by innovative approaches to management, governance, teaching and the curriculum, offering a broad and balanced curriculum with a specialist focus in one area.¹⁴

This description was consistent with Blunkett's original announcement. Academies were originally envisaged as being created in predominantly urban areas that were disadvantaged and where current schools were underperforming. There was also a clear emphasis on 'innovation' in a number of areas. While it can be argued that Academies are no longer simply replacing underperforming schools, or even located in areas of manifest disadvantage, current discourse still emphasises these aspects.

The terms of reference for the first PwC evaluation sets out the objectives for the Academies programme more explicitly, although it is not made clear who initially identified these and expressed them in these particular terms. Along with two 'immediate' objectives and eight 'intermediate' objectives, the following three 'ultimate' objectives were cited:¹⁵

- Academies will contribute to driving up standards by raising achievement levels for their own pupils, their family of schools and the wider community by breaking the cycle of underachievement and low aspirations in areas of deprivation with historical low performance;
- Academies will be part of local strategies to increase choice and diversity in education. They will have innovative approaches to one or more of governance, curriculum, staffing structures and pay, teaching and learning, structure of the school day and year, using ICT [Information and Communication Technology]; and
- Academies will be inclusive, mixed ability school[s].

The first objective is particularly interesting, and in many respects rather ambitious. The objective of the school improving its own results (compared to its predecessor school) is perhaps obvious. One of the intermediate objectives related to this was for Academies to

¹³ Hansard. 2007. House of Commons debates July 10th, Column 1329.

¹⁴ DfEE. 2001. *Schools: Building on Success – Raising standards, promoting diversity, achieving results*. Norwich: The Stationary Office. p. 49.

¹⁵ PwC. 2003. *Academies Evaluation – Annexes*. Nottingham: DfES Publications. p. A1.

achieve the national average for attainment (at various levels) within four years of opening, but this was perhaps far too high an expectation considering the schools' background. The ultimate objective of Academies contributing to improving achievement in the family of schools and wider community is also a very challenging task. This suggests that Academies are to be 'beacons' of educational excellence in their areas. On a practical level this means sharing their facilities and expertise, especially in their specialisms. As will be demonstrated later, this has been difficult to achieve so far for various reasons. The second objective posits Academies as part of a policy to enhance the choice of schools in a given location. This objective is predicated on Academies being significantly different and in employing innovative approaches to particular aspects of schooling. The final objective requires that the schools should be inclusive and mixed ability. As will be explored in the section on admissions and exclusions, some have challenged the extent to which Academies are inclusive, while others have questioned their disproportionately high number of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM).

The fourth PwC evaluation asserts that the factors unique to Academies are in respect of their:¹⁶

- Independence;
- Governance;
- Sponsor;
- Leadership model;
- Buildings;
- Specialism.

These aspects will be examined in the next part of the report. It should be noted that, while most of the above are unusual features, they are not all 'unique'. At the time of the programme's inception, both CTCs and maintained Specialist Schools could have specialisms, and virtually all maintained secondary schools are now Specialist Schools. There are also active sponsors in many of these schools although, in the case of Specialist Schools, they have nothing like the kind of influence that can be wielded by sponsors of Academies.

How underachieving schools are defined and identified

The definition and identification of underachieving schools is a central issue. Rogers and Migniuolo, in a Trades Union Congress (TUC) sponsored report on Academies, use a school being in special measures as an indicator of underachievement. They go on to note that, in the period between 2004 and 2006 (when the target number of Academies doubled from 200 to 400), the number of secondary schools in special measures halved from 97 to 48.¹⁷ They argue that this has lessened the need for Academies. But precisely how poor school performance is being defined in this context is debatable. As Sammons notes, definitions of school performance under New Labour have been subject to change: '[d]ifferent uses of the term standards, and the growing numbers of indicators, targets and different bases for

¹⁶ PwC. 2007. *Academies Evaluation – 4th Annual Report*. Nottingham: DCSF Publications. pp. 69-81.

¹⁷ Rogers and Migniuolo, *A New Direction*, pp. 4-5.

judgments can cause confusion because schools classed as ‘failing’ in some measures may do well in others.¹⁸

In Blunkett’s original speech outlining the programme, he made the following specification: ‘[t]o be eligible for Government support, the Academies will need to meet clear criteria. They will take over or replace schools which are either in special measures or underachieving.’¹⁹ What constitutes ‘underachieving’ at any given time is open to interpretation. In February 2008, the then schools minister Lord Adonis was more specific about how underachievement in this context could be defined:

...simply because a school is not placed in special measures by Ofsted does not make it a successful school. Parents rightly want good exam results too, and we will continue to focus on the hard results achieved by schools, and their rate of improvement, when deciding on reform options.²⁰

The definition of underachievement he recommended was those schools where 30% of pupils were not achieving five A* - C GCSEs, including English and maths. He identified 638 schools which were not currently achieving this (compared to 1610 in 1997), and also noted that in 161 of these schools only 20% of pupils were reaching this level of attainment.²¹ Reaching this target became the cornerstone of the *National Challenge*, officially launched by Ed Balls in June 2008.²² In this initiative all schools that were not meeting the target received extra assistance and could choose to become an Academy or join a trust or federation. It remains to be seen how many additional Academies will result from the National Challenge.

Some criticisms of the Academy programme:

There have been a number of areas of criticism of the Academies programme. The following aspects have proved especially controversial:

- Academies not needing to sign up to the national framework of pay and conditions;
- the role of the sponsors and, specifically, the suitability of certain sponsors;
- overrunning costs;
- admissions and exclusions practices;
- Academies’ voluntary involvement in partnership arrangements with other schools;
- lack of staff and parent representation on the governing body.

These criticisms are often framed by a more general unease about private sector involvement in education and, in the case of Academies, what is seen by some critics as largely unaccountable sponsors having significant influence over the direction of a publicly funded school. Ball asserts that Academies stand ‘as a *condensate* of the education policies of the

¹⁸ Sammons, P. 2008. ‘Zero tolerance of failure and New Labour approaches to school improvement in England’, *Oxford Review of Education* 34 (6), pp. 651-664. p. 652.

¹⁹ Blunkett, *Transforming Secondary Education*, p. 14.

²⁰ Adonis, ‘Academies and social mobility’, p. 13.

²¹ Adonis, ‘Academies and social mobility’, pp. 11-12.

²² DCSF. 2008. ‘National Challenge strategy launched to ensure that more children get better GCSEs’, Press Notice 2008/0109, June 10th

competition state'.²³ For him, Academies embody the increasing role of the private sector in education:

Academies are an experiment in and a symbol of education policy beyond the welfare state and an example and indicator of shifts taking place in governance and regulatory structures and they enact a set of metaorganisational changes. The programme signals a discursive-strategic shift towards a new kind of regulatory regime [...] Innovation, inclusion and regeneration are tied together in relation to the requirements of the digital workplace. Academies indicate a re-articulation and re-scaling of the state; they are part of a new localism and a new centralism; they encompass new kinds of autonomy and new forms of control: controlled decontrol.²⁴

Ball also highlights something that seems incongruous to those steeped in the assumptions of the traditional welfare state. The Academies programme promotes and champions private enterprise while also being concerned about disadvantage: '[Academies] involve a self-conscious attempt to promote entrepreneurialism and competitiveness – as well as a commitment to address social problems and inequalities'.²⁵ Woods *et al.* assert that there is a seemingly uncritical reliance on the private sector in the programme: '[i]n the academy schools programme control over what is public is being ceded to the private without due recognition of the value of the public and the problematics of the private'.²⁶ Yet the developments in the programme since 2007, with universities and independent schools being explicitly encouraged to become involved with Academies, have changed the character of the programme somewhat. The engagement of more public and third sector organisations, after having predominately private sponsors in the beginning, may represent a significant shift in emphasis for the programme.

There have been a number of instances which have been seen as negative examples of the programme. Capital City Academy Brent was the subject of media attention early on in the programme when it was revealed that 8 of the 13 governors would be appointed by its sponsor, Sir Frank Lowe.²⁷ Bexley Business Academy has also attracted controversy. Its striking new building was designed by Sir Norman Foster but was not completed in time. The Academy was rated unsatisfactory overall by Ofsted in 2005, which was particularly critical of its teaching and learning,²⁸ and it was issued with a Notice to Improve. However, when it was next inspected in 2007, it was rated satisfactory overall.²⁹

The lack of transparency over the selection of certain Academy sponsors is currently being challenged under EU procurement laws in London (Camden), Cumbria and Stoke.³⁰ It

²³ Ball, S. J. 2007. *Education PLC: Understanding Private Sector Participation in Public Sector Education*. London: Routledge. p. 171.

²⁴ Ball, *Education PLC*, p. 171.

²⁵ Ball, *Education PLC*, p. 171.

²⁶ Woods, P. A., Woods, G. J., and Gunter, H. 2007. 'Academy schools and entrepreneurialism in education', *Journal of Education Policy* 22 (2), pp. 237-259. p. 252.

²⁷ Thornton, K. 2002. 'Fears grow over power of academy sponsors', *Times Educational Supplement* August 23rd. http://www.tes.co.uk/search/story/?story_id=367581. Accessed 11/11/2007.

²⁸ Ofsted. 2006. *The Business Academy Bexley – Inspection Report*. Inspection number 283099.

²⁹ Ofsted. 2007. *The Business Academy Bexley – Inspection Report*. Inspection number 294655.

³⁰ Curtis, P. 2008. 'Academy expansion under threat', *The Guardian* November 5th, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/nov/05/camden-school-case> Accessed 07/11/2008.

should be noted that proposed bids for Academies do not always receive preference. In May 2007, for example, a proposal for a community school in Haringey was chosen over two separate proposals for an Academy (put forward by the United Learning Trust and Haberdashers' Aske's respectively) and a proposal for a Trust school (potentially sponsored by CfBT). The National Union of Teachers (NUT) report on Academies records that:

The adjudicators said, 'The [community school] proposal capitalises on the promoter's knowledge of the borough, draws on what has been learned in recent years in improving education in the borough and emphasises the potential collaboration with other local schools.' This decision followed a long campaign by the [NUT Support] division with local parents, teachers and governors.³¹

More generally, the PAC evaluation recommends that the department should not approve Academy projects where there are less costly and better value for money alternatives.³²

While it still remains to be seen whether concerns regarding the Academy programme are justified, or merely reflect the resistance of the 'educational establishment' to new ways of confronting problems that they have consistently failed to solve, the government seems determined to push the programme ahead, and even expand it. Its approach was apparently endorsed in a review by the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) early in 2008, although the details of that review are not in the public domain. The *Times Educational Supplement* has made two requests for the release of the report under the Freedom of Information Act which have been refused.³³

The Conservatives also support the policy, emphasising its continuation of aspects of CTCs. In a 2007 policy document the party outlined how it would create new schools, which they term 'New Academies', along similar lines:

New Academies will be free, non-selective, and within the maintained [i.e. state] system. They will typically be smaller than comparable, existing schools; they will be set up and run by existing educational providers, charities, trusts, voluntary groups, philanthropists and co-operatives on behalf of parents and pupils; they will be not-for-profit organisations and they will compete with surrounding local authority schools, helping to exert pressure for higher standards in the surrounding schools.³⁴

At the 2008 Conservative Party conference Michael Gove reiterated the commitment to creating such independent state schools, referring specifically to Swedish 'free schools' as a model. Gove also feels that the changes to the Academies programme since Brown became prime minister mean that there 'is a real danger that the opportunities academies promise

³¹ NUT. 2007. *Academies*.

<http://www.teachers.org.uk/resources/word/CompleteAcademiesbriefing2007new1.doc>. Accessed 01/02/2008. pp. 137-8.

³² Committee of Public Accounts. 2007. 'The Academies Programme', 52nd Report 2006-07. London: The Stationary Office. p. 6 (9).

³³ Stewart, W. 2008. 'Academy review findings will remain secret', *Times Educational Supplement* April 18th. p. 11.

³⁴ Conservative Party. 2007. *Raising the bar, closing the gap: An action plan for schools to raise standards, create more good school places and make opportunities more equal*. Brentford: TPF Group.

could be tragically curtailed' and asserts that the Conservatives would 'restore to schools all the freedoms they've lost'.³⁵

Summary

The Academies programme is a rather ambitious initiative which forms part of the government's ongoing attempts, within its education policy, to tackle disadvantage and raise attainment. The programme relies partly on the private sector being in partnership with the state, another key theme in New Labour policy-making. The scheme has so far been deemed successful enough to continue and indeed to accelerate its expansion towards a target of at least 400 Academies. However, there have been various criticisms of the programme, especially concerning the role of the sponsor and a potential democratic deficit arising from a lack of local authority involvement.

³⁵ Gove, M. 2008. 'Freeing good schools to help the most disadvantaged', speech to the Conservative Party annual conference, September 30th, http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2008/09/Michael_Gove_Freeing_good_schools_to_help_the_most_disadvantaged.aspx. Accessed 30/09/2008.

2. Distinctive aspects of Academies and their performance

This section will examine key parts of the Academies programme: independence; sponsorship; attainment; admissions and exclusions; effects on neighbouring schools; costs and buildings; and specialisms.

These include the supposedly unique aspects of Academies, highlighted by PwC in their fourth evaluation (cited in the last chapter).

2.1. Independence

In many respects the defining characteristic of Academies is their independence from the local authority. The line of accountability is directly to the Secretary of State. Academies do not charge fees and are predominantly state funded, apart from the £2 million paid by private sponsors, which should amount to 10% of the overall cost of the school. Sponsors can select the majority of the governing body and they agree their admissions policy with the Secretary of State. Lord Adonis championed the independent aspect of Academies: '[i]ndependent management is vital to their success, generating ambitious school leadership and sponsorship - from within and beyond the existing state system - and with it a vision and ethos focused on rapid success'.³⁶ Academies have been referred to by Blair as 'independent state schools',³⁷ which echoes Thatcher's description of CTCs as 'state-independent schools'.³⁸ It is important to clarify what independence means in this context and what the parameters of this freedom are.

Academies are companies limited by guarantee which have charitable status, and the governance of Academies remains a distinctive element of the programme. There is no prescription regarding the number of governors in Academies, but the number is usually around 13, the majority of whom are appointed by the sponsor. Other governors should include at least one parent, a local authority representative and the principal in an ex-officio capacity. It is not a requirement for them to have a staff representative, although many do.³⁹ Critics⁴⁰ assert that the absence of the requirement for staff governors is one of many elements that make Academies undemocratic. PwC found low levels of parent and staff representation on Academies' governing bodies in the earlier stages of their evaluation, despite the former being a requirement. However, they have observed an increase in staff representation in their 27 case-study Academies over time.⁴¹

³⁶ Adonis, A. 2008. 'Full steam ahead for academies', *The Times* January 9th.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article3148855.ece. Accessed 05/02/2008.

³⁷ Blair, T. 2005. Text of a speech given about the Education White paper quoted in *The Guardian* on October 24th, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/oct/24/speeches.education>. Accessed 12/04/2008.

³⁸ Whitty *et al.*, *Specialisation and Choice in Urban Education*, p.2.

³⁹ See DCSF Standards Site:

http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/academies/what_are_academies/organisation/?version=1#1576183
Accessed November 30th 2008.

⁴⁰ For example, the Anti-Academies Alliance and teaching unions.

⁴¹ PwC. 2008. *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*. Annesley: DCSF Publications.

A key component of Academies' independence was being outside of local authority control. Lord Adonis outlined this in 2008:

It was eight years ago that the academy concept first emerged, as a distinctly new model of independently managed state schools outside the traditional local authority system of school control but with central and local government in a new role as commissioner, with a particular focus on areas of underperformance and disadvantage.⁴²

He asserted that an Academy's uniqueness contributes to the diversity of education provision in an area, or 'diversity of supply', as the think-tank *Policy Exchange* terms it.⁴³ On more than one occasion Adonis drew parallels between the Academies programme and the old direct grant schools. In essence he saw Academies as independent non-fee charging schools:

I see this as the creation of a modern direct grant scheme, but it's different in that these schools aren't selective. [...] One of my biggest aims is to break the link between 'independent' schools and fee-paying, selective schools. I hope to generate the notion that there are two independent sectors: one of independent fee-paying schools and one of independent schools without fees. I don't see why independent management should be the preserve of the fee-paying sector.⁴⁴

In the absence of the local authority shaping the school, the sponsor(s) have the defining role in how the Academy is developed. Adonis outlined sponsors' role in Academies as follows:

Academy sponsors have integral control of, and responsibility for, the management of their academies. They appoint a majority of the governors; they control the school estate; they have unambiguous responsibility for management and appointments; they instil their ethos and expectations; they develop – within broad parameters – their own curriculum; and their budget comes as a single block grant from the government to allocate as they think appropriate, with no intermediaries taking a slice on the way. By the standards of state-funded schools at home and abroad, this is a high degree of independence.⁴⁵

Elsewhere Adonis reiterated the autonomy given to Academies, stating that it is 'the first time that school managers have been granted such a degree of independence - within a framework to ensure fair admissions and funding - in the state system.'⁴⁶ He also drew parallels to Sweden with its 900 state funded independent schools, and Chicago's 'Renaissance 2010' programme with 100 independently managed state schools.

⁴² Adonis, 'Academies and social mobility', p. 4.

⁴³ Sturdy, E. and Freedman. 2007. *Choice? What Choice? – Supply and demand in English education*. London: Policy Exchange. p. 17.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Morrison, J. 'Independents go all-inclusive', *The Independent Education and Careers* section October 4th, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁵ Adonis, A. 2007. Speech to HMC Annual Conference 12th October 2007. http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/software/andrew_adonis_speech_1007.doc?version=1. Accessed 12/12/2007. pp. 14-5.

⁴⁶ Adonis, 'Full steam ahead for academies'.

The independence of Academies means that their principals often feel a sense of liberation. This reflects the potential for more dynamic governance and management arrangements and greater control over the curriculum. Many contrast this favourably with the perceived restrictions imposed by local authorities on mainstream state schools.⁴⁷ Jean Hickman, principal of Walsall Academy, believes that the innovation afforded by the Academies programme is important because it allows the school to focus on the specific issues in the immediate community:

It is not so much innovation against political agendas or curricula that other state schools use; the innovation that I enjoy is that of taking a systematic approach to delivering the educational services to my children in a way that suits them, not dictated to me for what would be 18 schools. Currently, there are 18 schools in the borough for which I work, and all have to do it one way. My systems are specific to my community in Walsall.⁴⁸

Yet, for some, the autonomy of Academies in comparison to the perceived power of a local authority over other state schools can be overstated. Philip O’Hear, an Academy principal, also has experience of working for a local authority and believes that Academies can work with them:

A local authority director of education doesn’t run or manage schools. If they influence schools, they do so in partnership. A legally more independent partner should not be a threat to the leadership of a good authority, which needs to treat all its schools as self-managing. We work closely with our local authority and don’t see it as any threat to our independence.⁴⁹

The freedom available to Academy principals has led to instances of innovative leadership in terms of curricula and pedagogy. For example, at Mossbourne Community Academy curricular freedoms enabled the principal Michael Wilshaw to take certain pupils, particularly in Year 7, away from some of their mainstream subjects to focus on foundation skills and to have literary and numeracy catch-up classes. This has apparently led to great improvements in these pupils’ Key Stage 3 results compared to their Key stage 2 results.⁵⁰

The final PwC evaluation is generally positive about leadership in Academies, citing Ofsted evaluations and their own survey data.⁵¹ However, it is perhaps interestingly that one of their recommendations suggests the need for Academy principals to stay focused: ‘Academy principals should be discouraged from taking on extended and system leadership roles which take them outside their own Academy until such time as their Academy is in a steady state and showing consistent improvement’.⁵² In addition, PwC note that there are high attrition rates of Academy principals and also find that in their 27 case-study Academies no principals

⁴⁷ A number of Academy principals outline these benefits in the following volume: Astle, J. and Ryan, C. (eds) 2008. *Academies and the Future of State Education*. London: CentreForum.

⁴⁸ House of Commons. 2008. ‘Diversity of schools: Academies’, Uncorrected Oral Evidence give to the *Children, Schools, and Families Committee* February 25th, HC 311-ii. Response to Q124.

⁴⁹ O’Hear quoted in Wilby, P. 2008. ‘From one end of the corridor to the other’, *The Guardian* Education section December 9th, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Wilshaw, M. 2008. ‘Curriculum’, in Astle and Ryan, *Academies and the Future of State Education*, pp. 32-40. pp. 32-3.

⁵¹ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, pp. 125-41.

⁵² PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 141, recommendation 19.

were from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and that only just under a quarter were female (compared to 36% of secondary heads in England).

There is also a potential danger that the most talented head teachers will be drawn away from other state schools into Academies. The National Audit Office found that Academy principals in 2004-05 were paid on average between £18,000 and £32,000 more than those in similar-sized schools in the maintained sector.⁵³

Changes to schools policy generally has meant that the independence in Academies is now slightly less distinctive. All schools that are not deemed to be underperforming have been given greater management freedom, as outlined by the 2005 White paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*.⁵⁴ Yet at the same time there has also been greater emphasis on collaboration between schools in terms of 14-19 diplomas, 'behaviour partnerships'⁵⁵ and the *Every Child Matters* agenda.

As the sponsors can select the governors, appoint staff, and are not answerable to the local authority, the independence of Academies is considerable. Yet, as the programme expands, there may be logistical problems in so many schools (up to 400) being directly responsible to the Secretary of State. This latter point is particularly significant and it may prove impractical for a Secretary of State to oversee hundreds of different funding agreements.

2.2. Sponsorship

The 2001 White paper *Schools: Achieving Success* indicated that schools in general (not just Academies) would be assisted by government in building links with outside agencies:

We would anticipate that a range of partnerships would be possible. For example, successful schools might share the benefits of particularly strong subject departments, FE colleges with a vocational specialism might work with schools in that area, faith groups might help to build a school's ethos and the private sector could provide strong management support for schools, which are increasingly complex organisations to manage. We will not stand in the way of any arrangements which will raise standards for pupils.⁵⁶

Several elements in the above should be highlighted. Firstly, it is important to ascertain what precisely the sponsors are expected to bring to schools. One suggestion is that sponsoring bodies can bring specific expertise, such as an FE college assisting with vocational specialisms. The private sector's potential contribution is seen in terms of its expertise in management, particularly as schools are 'increasingly complex organisations to manage'. The idea that private sponsors can bring management expertise was echoed by Lesley King, Director of Academies at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), when giving evidence to the Children, Schools, and Families Committee in February 2008: 'I think that they bring expertise - not necessarily in pedagogy as sponsors leave that to principals and

⁵³ National Audit Office. 2007. *The Academies Programme*. London: The Stationary Office HC 254, Session 2006-07. p. 36 paragraph 3.42.

⁵⁴ DfES. 2005. *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All: More choice for parents and pupils*. Norwich: TSO. p. 9.

⁵⁵ These are officially termed: 'School Partnerships for Behaviour and Attendance'.

⁵⁶ DfES. 2001. *Schools: Achieving Success*. Nottingham: DfES Publications. p. 44.

staff, but in running organisations. That outside look can be useful.⁵⁷ This is indicative of a discourse on Academy sponsorship which has recently become more prominent, in which private sponsors' contribution is confined mainly to organisation and management, rather than pedagogy.

Sponsors are a particularly distinctive, if not unique, aspect of the Academies programme. There are sponsors in Specialist Schools and there will also be partners in Trust schools, but they have a much larger role in Academies. Recently schools minister Jim Knight stated that the DCSF carries out 'rigorous checks' to establish the suitability of potential sponsors, who should be able to demonstrate:

- transparency of business arrangements (both in the EU and overseas) and ability to account for funds (including donations from other parties);
- evidence of a successful business background including evidence of consistent and sustained trading (where appropriate);
- a long-term commitment to the UK education sector and the aims of the academies programme;
- potential to run a successful school and to contribute towards raising standards;
- ability to enhance the reputation of the academies programme;
- ability to promote community cohesion; and
- financial status commensurate with academy sponsorship and/or evidence of ability to raise the necessary funds where appropriate.⁵⁸

More recently the DCSF, in reaction to the investigation of an Academy sponsor over financial dealings, stated that someone with an existing criminal conviction could not become a sponsor. However, it was unclear if the DCSF would be able to remove a sponsor who subsequently broke the law.⁵⁹

In a speech to the inaugural *National Academy Conference* in 2008, Lord Adonis outlined four aspects that 'are at the heart of the academy movement': ethos, leadership, teaching, and talent development.⁶⁰ When outlining the importance of ethos, Adonis emphasises the role of sponsor in overcoming disadvantage in the school:

The insight that a strong ethos, underpinned by positive values and aspiration, enables a school, its staff and its pupils to unite with pride behind a common sense of purpose, lies at the heart of the academies concept. Setting a mission and vision is a key role of the Academy Sponsor, essential to establishing a culture of ambition to replace the poverty of aspiration that was generally there before.⁶¹

This posits a successful sponsor as someone who can overturn a culture of under-aspiration.

⁵⁷ House of Commons. 'Diversity of schools: Academies', response to Q86.

⁵⁸ Knight, J. 2008. Written Answer. Hansard September 1st, Column 1602W.

⁵⁹ Marley, D. 2008. 'Doubts emerge over sponsors', *Times Educational Supplement* December 12th, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Adonis, 'Academies and social mobility', p. 15.

⁶¹ Adonis, 'Academies and social mobility', p. 15.

As indicated earlier, this reflects a broader New Labour attitude to the private sector and education. In 2003, Gordon Brown, then Chancellor, stated his desire for business people to become more involved in education (not just limited to Academies):

When I went to school, no business ever came near our classrooms. I want every school pupil to be introduced to enterprise and commerce, not just enjoy a week of work experience.

I want teachers able to communicate the virtues of entrepreneurship and wealth creation. And just as business tycoons have become the pop idols of the business world, I want our local business leaders to become role models for today's young.⁶²

The implication for Academies is that successful sponsors act as 'role models', especially for pupils in areas of social and economic deprivation.

Hatcher, writing about increasing private involvement and 're-agenting' in education, believes that the motive of sponsors is not profit driven: '[t]hey display a range of motives. In the majority of cases they have a record of charitable donations and community activity and see their involvement in Academies in this context.'⁶³ Ball refers to Academy sponsors as 'hero entrepreneurs', whose involvement in Academies is symbolic of the New Labour project: '[t]hese hero entrepreneurs embody the values of New Labour: the possibilities of meritocracy, of achieving individual success from modest beginnings, and wealth creation from innovation and knowledge.'⁶⁴

There are potential dangers in the way such entrepreneurs sometimes operate in the Academy context. The PAC cautioned against sponsors contracting services out to one of their own companies: '[a] small number of academies have paid sponsors to provide services, for example for payroll management. Such services should be routinely put out to competitive tender, so that they meet existing procurement regulations and demonstrably avoid conflicts of interest.'⁶⁵ More recently the Academy chain Edutrust has become the subject of a government inquiry into alleged financial irregularities.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the final PwC report asserts that there is the potential for confusion over the accounting systems in Academies:

⁶² Brown, 2003. 'Britain's business to rival America's entrepreneurial dash', *The Telegraph* December 9th. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2003/12/09/do0901.xml&sheet=/portal/2003/12/09/ixportal.html>. Accessed 05/02/2008.

⁶³ Hatcher, R. 2006. 'Privatisation and sponsorship: the re-agenting of the school system in England', *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(5), pp. 599-619. p. 612.

⁶⁴ Ball, *Education PLC*, p. 175.

⁶⁵ Committee of Public Accounts. 2007. 'The Academies Programme', 52nd Report 2006-07. London: The Stationary Office. p. 31. Beckett criticises the apparent reluctance of certain sponsors to pay the full £2 million sponsorship fee and the tendency for some to pay 'in kind', as well as a few cases of a sponsor contracting services to their own company. See: Beckett, F. 2007. *The Great City Academy Fraud*. London: Continuum. p. 24.

⁶⁶ Curtis, P. 2008. 'Government launches inquiry into academy funds allegations', *The Guardian* November 28, p. 11.

There is a missing link...between what the Academies are reporting in their own accounts and the reconciliation of these with the Department's resource accounts and against their funding agreement (in areas such as the use by some Academies of general funding to establish subsidiary companies). This missing link creates a potential risk in respect of the Department's Parliamentary accountability⁶⁷

PwC were also unable to ascertain whether Academies financial freedoms have made a contribution to improved effectiveness and efficiency.⁶⁸

Although the government itself acknowledges that there must be appropriate 'safeguards' in terms of sponsors and accountability,⁶⁹ some critics of sponsors suggest that they are largely unaccountable and 'own' the school in perpetuity. That this was not the original intention can be seen in the 2001 Green Paper: 'we intend to develop a new model which would enable an external private or voluntary sector sponsor to take responsibility for a weak or failing school against a fixed-term contract of, say, five to seven years *with renewal subject to performance*.'⁷⁰ Yet in practice, maintaining sponsorship does not appear to be subject to performance and sponsors' 'performance' is currently not specifically monitored. For example, in Ofsted inspections of Academies, sponsors are sometimes mentioned as part of the management and governance at the school, but not always. The Ofsted inspection framework perhaps needs to take into account unique elements of Academies such as the role and performance of the sponsor. Currently the Ofsted inspections for Academies are similar to those for other state schools, although there are also additional monitoring visits soon after an Academy opens.⁷¹ In 2005, the then Education and Skills Committee questioned the general level of scrutiny in this area: '[w]e agree that the participation of an enthusiastic and committed private sponsor might benefit a school. But once again, the DfES does not seem to have set up a rigorous structure to evaluate the effects of sponsorship.'⁷²

Because the programme is still relatively new, it is unclear what will happen to the role of the sponsor over time. In giving evidence to the Children, Schools and Families Committee in February 2008, Margaret Tulloch, Chair of the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) council, questioned what will become of sponsors in the long-term.⁷³ More recently there has been the first instance of a sponsor appearing to want to withdraw from an Academy. Amey has sponsored Unity City Academy since it opened in 2002.⁷⁴ It paid its £2 million sponsorship fee, so there should be no financial implications for the school, but what will happen to the current management and governance structures remains unclear. The fourth PwC evaluation also raises questions about certain aspects of sponsorship, including succession planning and possible scenarios where a sponsor loses interest in their Academy. It highlights the following three issues:

⁶⁷ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 80.

⁶⁸ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 80.

⁶⁹ DfES, *Schools: Achieving Success*, p. 44.

⁷⁰ DfEE, *Schools: Building on Success*, p. 49. Emphasis added.

⁷¹ Mansell, W. 2008. 'Ofsted accused of academy bias', *Times Educational Supplement* December 12th, p. 8.

⁷² House of Commons. 2005. 'Secondary Education', Education and Skills Committee, Fifth report of the session 2004-05 March 9th, London: The Stationary Office. p. 16 (32).

⁷³ House of Commons, 'Diversity of schools: Academies', response to Q88.

⁷⁴ BBC Website. 2008. 'Academy sponsor seeks to withdraw', October 10th.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7663484.stm> . Accessed 24/10/2008.

- Succession planning – how are Academies planning to accommodate the retirement of Sponsors?
- Induction and support of Sponsors – how effective are the policy guidelines, support and induction for Sponsors and what improvements can be suggested?
- Sponsors’ role and input – how does this change over time and what is the process when the Academy does not feel well supported by its Sponsor?⁷⁵

They suggest that not only do sponsors need a clearer remit, training and support, but also that there needs to be some consideration of how their input might change over time and what happens when they cease active involvement. The power of sponsor within the school is, if not absolute, extremely powerful.

The recent influx of public and third sector organisations as sponsors or co-sponsors, with the £2 million fee waived, problematises the notion of ‘sponsorship’. In fact the term ‘partnership’ has been used in relation to some universities involved in the programme.⁷⁶ This might be indicative of a less active mode of involvement of outside organisations in the programme.

2.3. Attainment

Although academic attainment is clearly only one measure of educational achievement, the central importance given by government to raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils means that this must be a central feature of any evaluation of the success of its Academies programme. The importance of attainment appears to have increased even further with the advent of the *National Challenge*.

The first striking feature of the data is the variation between different Academies. So it is worth noting from the outset that the average results for Academies conceal considerable deviation among the individual schools. It is also important to note that much of the data currently available derive from a relatively small, and arguably unrepresentative, group of Academies.

The PwC evaluations compare the performance of the early Academies against a number of benchmarks. Firstly, there is the English secondary school average, although in view of their origins and locations, most Academies are not expected to be reaching this level yet. Secondly, there are two comparison groups, which constitute the 15% (comparison group 1) and 10% (comparison group 2) of schools with lowest prior attainment at Key Stage 2. PwC also look at overlapping intake schools, which are those schools where at least ten pupils have come from the same feeder primaries as Academies.⁷⁷ However, it must be questioned how appropriate the comparison groups of schools now are because the composition of Academies has changed and they have a smaller proportion of disadvantaged pupils (see later

⁷⁵ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 4th Annual report*, pp. 73.

⁷⁶ See for example; DCSF. 2008. ‘Balls’ academy revolution to bring ‘university culture’ to schools gathers pace’. Press notice 2008/0193 September 10th, http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0193 Accessed 06/10/08.

⁷⁷ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 4th Annual report*, p. 8.

section on admissions and exclusions). For example, Wrigley argues that the additional gains in attainment in Academies are cancelled out when the decline in the proportion of FSM pupils is taken into account.⁷⁸

For Key Stage 3, PwC found that the Academies average is somewhat below the national average for pupils achieving Level 5 or above in English, maths and science.⁷⁹ However, Academies, on the whole, had greater percentage point increases in Key Stage 3 attainment compared to similar schools and the national average.

In terms of GCSEs, the final PwC evaluation indicates that Academies are improving at a faster rate than similar schools, but were still achieving some way under the national average, as outlined in the tables below:

Table 1. GCSE results in 2007 – 5 A*-C GCSEs

Schools	% of pupils achieving equivalent of 5 A*-C GCSEs
PwC 24 case-study Academies average	48.2
Comparison Group 1 average	45.6
Comparison Group 2 average	45.1
Overlapping Intake Schools average	57.7
England average	60.8

Table 2. GCSE results in 2007 – 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and maths)

Schools	% of pupils achieving equivalent of 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and maths)
PwC 24 case-study Academies average	26.7
Comparison Group 1 average	25.8
Comparison Group 2 average	24.7
Overlapping Intake Schools average	40.7
England average	46.0

In 2007 Academies had higher proportions of their pupils achieving five good GCSEs than their two comparator groups, but were still considerably below their overlapping intake

⁷⁸ Wrigley, T. 2008. 'Results sleight of hand', *Anti Academies Alliance* National broadsheet No. 1, September, p. 6.

⁷⁹ All the following data on attainment is taken from the final PwC report, and does not include the three former CTCs. See: PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, pp. 192-203.

schools and the England average. When English and maths are taken into account, 26.7% of pupils in the PwC case-study Academies attained at least five good GCSEs, which is nearly 20% below the national average. This level of attainment is almost 1% higher than comparison group 1 and 2% higher than comparison group 2, and it is 14% below that of the overlapping intake schools. It needs to be borne in mind that the government's benchmark, as part of the *National Challenge*, is for all schools to have at least 30% of their pupils achieving at this level by 2011.

PwC also look at the percentage point change in the proportion of pupils achieving five good GCSEs for the first three phases of Academies. While all three had greater percentage point increases in the proportion of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C compared to the comparison groups and the English average, this is less marked when English and maths are taken into account. In fact the Phase 1 Academies performed considerably less well in this respect than their comparison groups.

In terms of post-16 or key stage 5 qualifications, the alterations to the tariff calculation in 2006 mean that changes over time are difficult to gauge. The calculation now includes vocational qualifications which makes like for like comparisons difficult. However, for the 16 Academies that had results in 2007, there was a slightly higher points average in the Academies than in the comparator groups, but it was considerably lower than the overlapping intake schools and the English average. The Academies also experienced a decline in the key stage 5 average points score from the previous year whereas the comparator groups, overlapping intake schools and the English averages improved in this period.

The PAC report on Academies is particularly critical of the narrow curriculum and options for post-16 pupils. It recommends that Academies should collaborate with other local schools, colleges and other providers to give their pupils greater choice.⁸⁰ The NAO evaluation also notes the poor performance of sixth-form provision in Academies. It suggests that this has been affected by three factors: poor legacy from the predecessor schools; the small size of sixth-forms in most Academies and; a lack of focus on post-16 provision in Academies during their first few years.⁸¹

For attainment in Academies overall, the fifth PwC evaluation concludes that:

...within a positive overall picture, there was considerable diversity across individual Academies in the levels and improvements achieved against many performance measures. This suggests that, rather than a simple uniform 'Academy effect', there has been a more complex and varied process of change taking place.⁸²

The variation between Academies in terms of attainment and the absence of a uniform 'Academy effect' has important implications for the programme, especially when the establishment of further Academies is used in policies, such as the *National Challenge*, as a way of raising achievement.

⁸⁰ PAC, 'The Academies Programme', p.5.

⁸¹ National Audit Office. 2007. *The Academies Programme*. London: The Stationary Office HC 254, Session 2006-07. pp. 20-21.

⁸² PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 217.

It is worth exploring the variation between Academies in more detail, especially in the context of the *National Challenge*. The 2007 GCSE results for 42 Academies that opened prior to 2007 (excluding four former CTCs) are summarised below, along with their contextual value added performance (from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4). This is a greater number than the PwC case-study Academies (27 including former CTCs). It includes the performance of the Academies opened by September 2006, although not all of the Academies then open had pupils in Key Stage 4,⁸³ so there are no indicators currently available for a number of Academies. Those Academies that opened more recently would have had less time to improve their pupils' performance in this respect, so phases of Academies are distinguished in the data below.

The table below records whether the contextual value added score exceeds 1,000 (which indicates that value added is being achieved):

Table 3. 2007 Contextual Value Added (CVA) performance (from Key Stage 2 to 4) for Academies (where available)

Academies	Year opened	No. of Academies opened that year	No. of Acads eligible for CVA performance indicator	No. of Acads with CVA scores above the 1,000 benchmark
Phase 1	2002	3	3	2
Phase 2	2003	8	6	6
Phase 3	2004	5	3	1
Phase 4	2005	8	10	8
Phase 5	2006	18	17	12
Total		42	39	29

Of the 39 Academies with a contextual value added score (Key Stages 2 to 4) in the 2007 data, 29 were above 1,000. Of those 22 Academies that had been open for at least two years, 17 were above 1,000.

The table below records how many Academies now have at least 30% of their pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C (including English and maths), which is the government's *National Challenge* benchmark for schools to be not underachieving:

⁸³ Note – The four converted CTCs (which were already successful) are excluded from the analysis in the rest of this chapter.

Table 4. 2007 GCSEs results including English and Maths for Academies (where applicable)

Academies	Year opened	No. of Academies opened that year	No. of Acads eligible for GCSE PI	No. of Acads With 30%+ 5 GCSEs inc Eng & maths
Phase 1	2002	3	3	0
Phase 2	2003	8	6	1
Phase 3	2004	5	3	1
Phase 4	2005	8	8	5
Phase 5	2006	18	16	3
Total		42	36	10

Of the 36 Academies with Key Stage 4 results, only 10 achieved over the threshold of 30% of pupils with five good GCSEs (including English and Maths). Excluding the Phase 5 Academies (which had only converted the previous year), 7 out of 20 achieved this benchmark.

The table below records whether there had been an improvement in GCSE results in Academies between 2006 and 2007. The right-hand column records whether GCSE results (% of pupils achieving five good GCSEs including English and maths) have improved from the previous year:

Table 5. Improvement in GCSEs results in 2007 including English and Maths for Academies (where applicable)

Academies	Year opened	No. of Academies opened	No. of Acads where two years worth of GCSE results available	No of Acads improving on previous year's GCSEs (5 A*-C inc Eng & maths)
Phase 1	2002	3	3	1
Phase 2	2003	8	6	3
Phase 3	2004	5	3	2
Phase 4	2005	8	8	6
Total		24	20	12

Of the data available for 20 Phase 1-4 Academies, 12 improved their GCSEs from the previous year.

Despite the average rate of improvement in Academies highlighted by PwC, the fact that the majority of the schools do not yet pass the 30% five good GCSEs (including English and maths) benchmark is a matter for concern. In addition, changes to pupil composition in Academies (see next section) means that any improvement in attainment in Academies has to be seen in the context of a more advantaged pupil body. As Phase 1 Academies have seen their first cohort go all the way through, it might be expected that they would now be hitting this target. However, none of the first three Academies achieved this in 2007. Eventually, the vast majority of Academies will need to achieve this goal, and certainly by 2011, the target date set by the government within its *National Challenge* programme, by which all schools will be required to reach the benchmark.

At the time of writing the provisional 2008 GCSE results indicate that, on average, the percentage of pupils in Academies achieving the *National Challenge* benchmark rose again and at a greater rate than the national average.⁸⁴ However, in self-declared provisional results from 31 Academies reported in *The Guardian*, 16 schools were still below the *National Challenge* target and 9 of the 31 Academies had experienced falls in the percentage of pupils achieving the benchmark from the previous year.⁸⁵

2.4. Admissions and exclusions

Academies' admissions practices have been the subject of some discussion. The 2007 NAO report on Academies asserts that: '[d]espite perceptions among some neighbouring schools, academy admissions arrangements appear to be in line with the statutory School Admissions Code of Practice.'⁸⁶ Academies, like Specialist Schools, can select 10% of pupils on aptitude for the school's specialism.⁸⁷

A 2006 report by the *National Foundation for Educational Research* (NFER) details the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM by school type, which is presented in the table below:

Table 6. Pupils eligible for FSM by type of secondary school (NFER, 2006)⁸⁸

Measure	Academies	Community Schools	Foundation Schools	Voluntary Aided Schools	Voluntary Controlled Schools
1) number of schools	17	2168	514	546	120
2) % of intake from local postcode districts	18	28	27	13	31
3) mean number of postcode districts per school	21	14	18	25	14
4) % of pupils living in local district eligible for FSM	31	16	12	19	11
5) % of pupils at school eligible for FSM	40	17	10	14	9
6) % of pupils at school living in local district and eligible for FSM	39	16	11	15	10
7) % of pupils at school living outside district and eligible for FSM	41	19	10	13	8

⁸⁴ See DCSF website: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000815/index.shtml> Accessed 07/11/2008.

⁸⁵ Curtis, P. 2008. 'As 51 academy schools prepare for first day, GCSEs show work still needs to be done', *The Guardian* August 30th. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/aug/30/newschools.gcses>. Accessed 30/10/2008.

⁸⁶ NAO, *The Academies Programme*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ This only applies if the school's specialism is one of the following: modern foreign languages, the performing arts, the visual arts, physical education or sport, design and technology and information technology. See: NAO, *The Academies Programme*, p. 23 n19.

⁸⁸ Chamberlain, T., Rutt, S., and Fletcher-Campbell, F. 2006. *Admissions: Who goes where? – Messages from the statistics*. Slough: National Foundation for Education Research. p. 7.

What is striking about the above is the distinctiveness of the 17 early Academies with regard to composition, compared to other school types. While it is the school type with the second lowest proportion of pupils from its local postcode districts (with 18%), Academies have a greater proportion of FSM pupils than their postcode districts. 40% of pupils from Academies were eligible for FSM, compared to 31% of pupils residing in Academies' postcode districts. Similarly, given their histories, Academies are also more likely to have a greater proportion of pupils with low attainment in Key Stage 2 compared to their postcode area.⁸⁹

Yet it is also clear that the composition of Academies has changed over time, with a year on year *decrease* in the proportion of pupils at Academies eligible for FSM. In a written answer in October 2008 Jim Knight cited figures from the School Census of the total percentage of pupils in all Academies eligible for FSM between 2003-2008:

Table 7. Maintained secondary schools and academies: school meal arrangements: Position in January each year 2003 to 2008: England⁹⁰

	Maintained secondary schools			Academies		
	Number of pupils (used for FSM calculation)	Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	% of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	Number of pupils (used for FSM calculation)	Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	% of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals
2003	3,308,490	478,920	14.5	2,720	1,230	45.3
2004	3,326,800	477,290	14.3	10,220	4,250	41.6
2005	3,317,590	485,520	14.0	15,200	5,920	39.0
2006	3,309,720	448,680	13.6	25,310	8,480	33.5
2007	3,272,480	429,700	13.1	41,560	13,890	33.4
2008	3,214,031	410,810	12.8	74,530	21,630	29.0

The FSM rate in 2003 in Academies was 45.3% in the first wave, although there were relatively few pupils (2,720 pupils). The FSM rate then fell from 41.6% in 2004 (when there was a total of 10,220 pupils in all Academy schools) to 29% in 2008 (when there was a total of 74,530 pupils in all Academies). This is a fall of 16.3 percentage points over five years in Academies compared to 1.7% nationally. This is due to both a decline in proportion of pupils eligible for FSM in most of the early Academies and the fact that later phases of Academies tended to have lower FSM rates to begin with.⁹¹

The fifth PwC evaluation notes that, while the proportion of FSM pupils in Academies has declined, there has been an increase in the absolute number of pupils eligible for FSM in Academies as the overall pupil population in the schools has expanded. Yet in some

⁸⁹ Chamberlain, Rutt, and Fletcher-Campbell, *Admissions: Who goes where?*, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Table based on data from the School Census presented in: Knight, J. 2008. Written Answer. Hansard October 9th, Column 806W.

⁹¹ See: PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, pp. 45-6.

Academies there have been dramatic changes in FSM rates, one falling from 51% in 2003 to 11% in 2007, and another rising from 9% in 2005 to 43% in 2007.⁹² In addition, according to PwC there was an overall increase in 2007 in the percentage of EAL (English as an additional language) and in the absolute numbers, but not percentage, of SEN (Special Educational Needs) pupils.⁹³

In terms of exclusions, it was reported in August 2007 that Academies have exclusion rates three times that of neighbouring schools.⁹⁴ This can have damaging effects on neighbouring schools if Academies exclude more pupils but do not take excluded pupils from elsewhere in the authority. In March 2008, it was announced by Children, Schools and Families Secretary Ed Balls that all schools would be compelled to take excluded pupils from other local schools as part of a 'behaviour partnership', and that this would include Academies. Balls states that 90% of Academies are already in these partnerships, compared to 97% of all secondary schools.⁹⁵ Yet the level of activities in these partnerships can differ. Sir Alan Steer notes that while other schools including new Academies should be bound by legislation, existing Academies would have individually to make an agreement: 'in a clear formal commitment by each of them to participate'.⁹⁶ This highlights how the governance arrangements in Academies, with the sponsors reporting directly to the Secretary of State, can cause difficulties.

In terms of half-days missed through unauthorised absences, in 2007 Academies had a higher rate than the national average and their overlapping intake schools. However, the Academies average was less than their two comparator groups. Needless to say, the average masks considerable variation between individual Academies.⁹⁷

Academies certainly seem popular and, according to Lord Adonis, are on average three times oversubscribed.⁹⁸ This will mean that their intakes will change over time. As we have seen, according to the School Census, the percentage of pupils from eligible for FSM fell from 45.3% in 2003 to 29% in 2008. At first sight, these data are disturbing in that they may seem to support the view that these schools have exploited their freedom to recruit affluent and more biddable pupils. Indeed, the PwC report itself urges the government to investigate whether the freedom Academies have over their own admission policies serves to exclude poor children and to review instances where the proportion of FSM pupils in an Academy falls substantially below the proportion of such pupils in the catchment area.⁹⁹ In particular, they suggest that a system of 'fair banding' may be acting against the interests of children

⁹² PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, pp. 45-6.

⁹³ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, pp. 36-65.

⁹⁴ Asthana, A. 2007. 'Academy exclusion "is selection by the backdoor"', *The Observer* August 12th. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/aug/12/politics.news.schools>. Accessed 20/09/2007.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Shepherd, J. 2008. 'Excluded children to be traded between schools', *The Guardian* March 26th. <http://education.guardian.co.uk/pupilbehaviour/story/0,,2268161,00.html>. Accessed 27/03/2008.

⁹⁶ Steer, A. 2008. 'Behaviour review: an initial response'. March 26th. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance/uploads/Steer%20interim%20260308FINAL.pdf>. Accessed 20/04/2008.

⁹⁷ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 57.

⁹⁸ Adonis, Speech to HMC Annual Conference, p. 13.

⁹⁹ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, pp. 64-5.

from poorer areas, a point emphasised in the *Daily Mail* report on the study.¹⁰⁰ PwC suggest potential equity issues related to such testing, such as parental availability at weekends and transport, need to be addressed.¹⁰¹ Gorard commented some time ago that it would be of interest to see whether Academies follow the pattern of reducing their share of disadvantaged pupils once their admissions are not linked to those of the local authority, and this does indeed seem to have been the case.¹⁰²

However, it is possible to look at that in another way, as Leaton Gray and Whitty suggest:

...if the improvements in examination results were partly down to changes in the social mix of children, this is consistent with broader evidence that the presence of high-achieving and well-motivated pupils can impact positively on the performance of the whole school. As Maden (2002: 336) puts it, successful schools tend to have ‘a “critical mass” of more engaged, broadly “pro-school” children to start with’.¹⁰³

After all, the third objective of Academies specifies a ‘social mixed’ school, rather than just having a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils.

Furthermore, if the improvement has been brought about in some Academies by their use of ability banded admissions, this may not be something to regret. It may actually point to the benefits of a wider re-introduction of banding, but on an area-wide rather than individual school basis in order to ensure a more equitable distribution of children of different abilities across all the schools in an area rather than just creating another socially imbalanced school down the road.

Thus while PwC sees the greater attraction of middle-class families to Academies as a positive development, it is also cautious about some of the possible consequences: ‘[w]hilst this suggests that there is now greater choice and diversity for these families, there is also a danger that their greater ability to manoeuvre within the market may disadvantage more socially deprived pupils’.¹⁰⁴

2.5. Effects on neighbouring schools

As noted earlier, one of the original objectives of the Academies programme was for the new schools to assist in raising performance in other local schools, as well as in the school itself: ‘Academies will contribute to driving up standards by raising achievement levels for their own pupils, their family of schools and the wider community’.¹⁰⁵ The target later had a

¹⁰⁰ Clark, L. 2007. ‘Academy schools “turning away poorer pupils”’, *The Daily Mail* July 20th. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=469654&in_page_id=1770. Accessed 11/04/2008.

¹⁰¹ PwC also express these concerns: PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 64.

¹⁰² Gorard, S. 2005. ‘Academies as the “future of schooling”: is this an evidence-based policy?’, *Journal of Education Policy* 20 (3), pp. 369-377. p. 371.

¹⁰³ Leaton Gray, S. and Whitty, G. 2007. ‘Comprehensive schooling and social inequality in London: past, present and possible future’, in Brighouse, T. and Fullick, L. (eds). *Education in a Global City: Essays from London*. London: Bedford Way Papers, pp. 95-121. p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁵ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – Annexes*, p. A1.

specific timescale of four years in which Academies should improve collaboration with neighbouring schools, mainly through sharing resources and expertise.¹⁰⁶ In many ways, this notion of Academies improving their neighbouring schools' performance was one of the more ambitious parts of the programme. Indeed, some critics suggest that the impact of Academies on neighbouring schools may not necessarily be positive.¹⁰⁷

The main impact on neighbouring schools relate to: admissions and social composition; exclusions policies; and use of facilities. There is not a great deal of data relating to this so far, as Rogers and Mignuolo note: '[i]t was however very difficult to find evidence of the impact of Academies on neighbouring schools (it is probably too early) and equally difficult to obtain information from Academies themselves.'¹⁰⁸

Yet several of the evaluations of Academies have touched upon this issue in terms of co-operation with other schools, or the lack of it, if not in great detail. In 2005, the then Education and Skills Committee recommended that Academies' impact on neighbouring schools should be monitored. This was in terms of Academies drawing away pupils and teachers from other schools in a locality.¹⁰⁹ The PAC report notes that 'Academies had been liable to pay VAT on their entire building cost, where paid-for usage exceeded 10% of the available area, time or people using the building. As a result, local communities have not been able to derive maximum benefit from their buildings.'¹¹⁰ This restriction was lifted in March 2007.

The NAO report also asserts that the objective of Academies working with local schools is not being met: '[c]urrently there is little collaboration between academies and neighbouring schools as many academies are focusing on improving their own performance before devoting more time to developing links with other schools.'¹¹¹ The NAO conducted a survey of neighbouring schools (in 2005-06) and found that the greatest amount of contact with Academies was meetings with senior managers, which was cited in just under half of the neighbouring schools interviewed. The next highest was working together on sixth-form provision (just under 20%). All other forms of co-operation were only cited by under 10% of neighbouring schools.¹¹² But ultimately the NAO conclude that 'Academies do not appear to impact unfairly on the performance of neighbouring schools.'¹¹³

The third PwC evaluation found some cooperation between Academies and local schools, although this was more common in Academies open for at least two years than those that have been open for just one, supporting the NAO's point about this developing over time. For example, 54% of staff interviewed in Academies open for two years felt that their school 'proactively supports schools within the local community by sharing expertise and resources',

¹⁰⁶ PwC. 2006. *Academies Evaluation – 3rd Annual Report*. Nottingham: DfES Publications. pp. 58-9.

¹⁰⁷ For example the Anti Academies Alliance. See: Anti Academies Alliance. 2007. *Report on the MPs Committee of enquiry into academies and trust schools – 12 June 2007, Palace of Westminster*. Basford: The Russell Press. p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ Rogers and Mignuolo, *A New Direction*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ House of Commons, 'Secondary Education', p. 16 (32).

¹¹⁰ Committee of Public Accounts. 'The Academies Programme', p. 15.

¹¹¹ NAO, p. 14.

¹¹² NAO, p. 24.

¹¹³ NAO, p. 23.

compared to 32% in Academies open only a year.¹¹⁴ PwC conclude that: '[t]he evidence suggests that as time passes and the Academies become more embedded, they have begun to engage more fully with other local schools, although it is clear that in doing this a number of significant barriers and blockages have had to be overcome.'¹¹⁵ These barriers include the suspicions of local schools. The report quotes an Academy sponsor's delegate on how the school is perceived locally:

I think their feelings are that we have had a fortune spent on us, and that they are the poor relative of the family and are hard done by. I think they feel that we might take the brighter students, even though we have the standard admission criteria – there's no selection here, apart from the 10% specialism selection.¹¹⁶

Similarly the NAO report asserts that: '[m]any academies acknowledge that relationships with neighbouring secondary schools can be challenging. Some academies consider that relationships are strained, but overall academies consider that relationships are improving.'¹¹⁷

The fourth PwC evaluation asserts that recent changes in policy have necessitated closer cooperation between Academies and other local schools:

Changes to the policy landscape, including the impacts of Building Schools for the Future, Extended Schools, 14-19 Curriculum, and Every Child Matters have all been significant for Academies, and have resulted in closer links being forged between Academies and their local community of schools.¹¹⁸

Concrete evidence of closer links has not been provided. Academies appear to have some advantages over other schools. Certainly in terms of finance, they have extra transition funding for the first few years by virtue of being an Academy, in addition to receiving additional money for having specialist status (as all Specialist Schools do), which can altogether total around £2 million over the first four years.¹¹⁹

The final PwC report attempts to gauge the impact of Academies on neighbouring schools by comparing changes in Academy composition with changes in the intakes of their overlapping intake schools. Despite the fact that the FSM rates in Academies have fallen, they assert that this has not necessarily been at the expense of neighbouring schools:

Since the overall national percentage of pupils eligible for FSM fell by only 1.5 pp between 2002 and 2007, a fall in an Academy's FSM percentage greater than the national average will have been associated with offsetting changes elsewhere. However, these offsetting changes appear to have been spread more widely than the schools with which they have traditionally competed for pupils from the overlapping primary feeder schools.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 3rd Annual Report*, p. 49.

¹¹⁵ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 3rd Annual Report*, p. 52.

¹¹⁶ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 3rd Annual Report*, p. 48.

¹¹⁷ NAO, *The Academies Programme*, p. 24.

¹¹⁸ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 4th Annual Report*, p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Martyn Coles, principal of City of London Academy, responding to questioning by David Chaytor. House of Commons. 2008. 'Diversity of schools: Academies', Q154-Q160.

¹²⁰ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 56.

Yet some are more critical. The Anti Academies Alliance's own enquiry into the Academies programme reports various instances of Academies having a negative impact on local schools and surmises: 'evidence the enquiry has received demonstrates how strategic planning and co-operation in communities with academies have both been undermined.'¹²¹ This included a rise in SEN pupils in the school nearest to the Bexley Business Academy after it opened. More generally, non-cooperation of Academies in 'behaviour partnerships' can have a negative impact on neighbouring schools.

2.6. Buildings and costs

Some of the most stringent criticisms of Academies have been related to their cost, with many of the early Academies running over budget. This was often due to new buildings. Much was made about new builds in early Academies, which were often innovative designs. The Standards Site, in reference to the implementation stage of Academies, suggests that there can be important symbolic value in these buildings:

The most noticeable feature of this stage, however, will be the building works, creating a visibly different school and contributing to the establishment of a new ethos and a growing expectation that the new Academy will make a real difference. New buildings will also help raise expectations and demonstrate the investment that is being made in the local community.¹²²

From a more critical perspective, Ball believes that radical new builds have important symbolic value: '[a]s texts the Academy buildings are enactments of a new "imaginary" economy. They also embody the enterprise and values of their sponsors'.¹²³ The second PwC evaluation records disaffection with buildings in a few Academies amongst some staff: '[t]his feedback from staff is reflected in the clear sense from the interviewees that, whilst the "bold statement" aspect of the new Academy buildings was important, there had perhaps been too much emphasis on this at the expense of some of the more practical requirements of modern teaching and learning spaces.'¹²⁴

In total a great deal of funding has been put into the Academies programme. In 2007 the NAO stated that by October 2006 £1.3 billion had been spent on the programme. The projected total capital cost for the initial target of 200 Academies is £5 billion.¹²⁵ The NAO notes that 17 of the first 26 Academies 'suffered capital cost overruns, averaging £3 million.'¹²⁶ Academies cost around £24 million on average compared to between £20 and £22 million for other new secondary schools. The most expensive Academy so far is Haberdashers' Aske's Knights at just over £40 million. In early Academies the building costs amounted to £21,000 per place, compared to £14,000 per place in other new secondary school builds.¹²⁷ Yet the NAO feel direct comparisons should not be made: 'the capital costs of these schools are not directly comparable with academies because of a number of factors,

¹²¹ Anti Academies Alliance. *Report on the MPs Committee of enquiry into academies and trust schools*, p. 36.

¹²² See: http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/setting_up/?version=1, Accessed 01/10/2008.

¹²³ Ball, *Education PLC*, p. 172.

¹²⁴ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 2nd Annual Report*, p. 34.

¹²⁵ NAO, *The Academies Programme*, p. 5.

¹²⁶ NAO, *The Academies Programme*, p. 6.

¹²⁷ House of Commons, 'Secondary Education', pp. 13-4 (22).

including differences in location, site constraints, number and age range of pupils and local construction prices.¹²⁸ The NAO report goes on to outline how the government is looking to reduce the costs of Academies by incorporating the development of new buildings into the *Building Schools for the Future* (BSF) programme. BSF will also make the issue of Academies having new builds much less relevant as it is planned to have every secondary school upgraded by 2020. Yet it should be noted that concerns with proposed school designs in general (not just Academies) have been raised. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has a school design panel and found that: '[o]f the 24 schemes that are now at planning application stage, or where a single design team has been chosen, three have been rated 'good' or 'excellent' and 21 either 'not yet good enough' or 'mediocre'.¹²⁹

The PAC believes that lessons learned from early projects that went over budget in the Academies programme should be disseminated.¹³⁰ While broadly endorsing the programme, the PAC is cautious about the value for money aspects of Academies:

Academies are a relatively costly means of tackling low attainment. As the programme expands further, there is an increasing risk that individual academy projects may be proposed where the value for money case for an academy is not made. The Department should reject proposals that put at risk the viability of local schools and colleges providing a good quality education, including proposals relating to education from age 16. *It should not approve academy projects in locations where a less costly solution, for example requiring less capital expenditure and lower or no startup funds, would provide better value for money.*¹³¹

This means that the government should not be overly reliant on Academies when seeking to fulfil one of the central objectives of the programme, to tackle disadvantage and educational underperformance. Investment in other schools, for example through BSF, might be equally effective.

2.7. Specialisms

The range of specialisms in Academies is very much skewed towards certain subjects. Woods *et al.* suggest that Academies, due to the role of the sponsor, are fundamentally tied to business and enterprise. They examine 53 academies that were open or in development in 2005, and find that 29 (52%) have a business and/or enterprise specialism.¹³² They conclude that the findings 'indicate the degree to which existing hierarchies of power and capital tend to be reproduced in the pattern of sponsors and specialisms.'¹³³ The situation had changed little by September 2007. Of the 83 Academies open by this date, 42 (50.6%) had business and/or enterprise as one of their specialisms,¹³⁴ with 11 (13.3%) of these schools offering this as the sole specialism. However, the 47 Academies that opened in September 2008 had a

¹²⁸ NAO, *The Academies Programme*, p. 6.

¹²⁹ Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. 2008. 'Threshold needed to improve school design'. Press release July 24th.

¹³⁰ Committee of Public Accounts. 'The Academies Programme', pp. 28-9.

¹³¹ Committee of Public Accounts. 'The Academies Programme', pp. 31. Emphasis added.

¹³² Woods, Woods, and Gunter, 'Academy schools and entrepreneurialism in education', p. 245.

¹³³ Woods, Woods, and Gunter, 'Academy schools and entrepreneurialism in education', p. 238.

¹³⁴ There are various permutations on these specialisms. Sometimes business and enterprise are separate specialisms, sometimes they are referred to as 'business enterprise', some schools have one and not the other.

more diverse range of specialisms, with only a third offering business and/or enterprise. A summary of specialisms in Academies is presented below. Note that an Academy can have more than one specialism, and some have as many as four.

Table 8. Specialisms in the 130 Academies open by September 2008¹³⁵

Specialism*	Pre-2008 (83)		Sept 2008 (47)		Total (130)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Business and Enterprise	42	50.6%	16	34%	58	44.6%
ICT/Technology/Built Environment	24	28.9%	12	25.5%	36	27.7%
Arts/Music	15	18.1%	13	27.7%	28	21.5%
Sports	17	20.5%	9	19.1%	26	20.0%
Science	14	16.9%	11	23.4%	25	19.2%
Maths	7	8.4%	7	14.9%	14	10.8%
Health	5	6.0%	4	8.5%	9	6.9%
Media	5	6.0%	3	6.4%	8	6.2%
Languages	5	6.0%	0	0	5	3.8%
Other	5	6.0%	5	10.6%	10	7.7%

*Most Academies have more than one specialism. The data above record the number of Academies with one of their specialisms in that subject.

Looking at the 130 open Academies as a whole, there is now a more diverse range of specialisms than in the past as a result of the Academies that opened in 2008. Under half (58) of Academies now have business and/or enterprise as one of their specialisms. The next highest subject is still ICT and Technology with 36 (27.7%), then arts/music with 28 (21.5%). Core subjects such as science and maths are represented in comparatively few Academies, although they were more prevalent in the 2008 wave. This issue has to be addressed as the programme goes on, although some local authorities are ‘co-ordinating’ different specialisms between new Academies in their areas so that there is not an overlap (see later section on emerging models of Academies).

Summary

This section has examined some of the key aspects of the Academies programme. It appears that the role of sponsor needs to be more accountable and that provision for their succession should be clarified. While attainment appears to be improving in Academies as a whole, this disguises significant variations between Academies. In addition, of the 36 schools that had been Academies for at least two years in 2007 that were not former CTCs, only 10 have reached the *National Challenge* target of 30% of pupils achieving at least five good GCSEs (including English and maths). The credibility of the programme will be threatened if a greater proportion of Academies do not soon hit this benchmark.

¹³⁵ The exact title of specialisms varies so the table summarises generic subject areas.

Concerns have been expressed about exclusions policies in some Academies, although it may be that new legislation will address this issue. Academies must collaborate with neighbouring schools on such issues if they are to achieve the goal of collaboration with local schools. The costs of Academies also look to be high, and the PAC conclude that Academies are not proven to provide greater value for money and that they are a 'costly means of tackling low attainment.' In addition, specialisms in Academies tend to be in a narrow range of subjects, with just under half of Academies having a specialism in business and/or enterprise.

While the social composition of a number of Academies has become more diverse in terms of a smaller percentage of pupils being eligible for FSM, there is also evidence suggesting that early Academies have a higher proportion of these pupils compared to their localities. The changing composition may be a result of Academies becoming more attractive to parents compared to the previous 'underperforming' school. Yet it has to be borne in mind that a central objective of the programme is to tackle disadvantage and the 16.3% fall in FSM pupils in Academies certainly requires explanation and justification.

3. Changes to the Academies Programme

There have been various changes to the Academies programme over the last couple of years. As will be demonstrated in this section, some believe these changes have been to the detriment of the programme, while others believe that there has been a significant improvement. What is indisputable is that some shift in the policy has occurred. Lesley King feels the policy has evolved over time: '[i]t is not the same programme as it was five and a half years ago. New sponsors are on board and there are changes all the time; it is changing according to circumstances. The programme is better than it was five and a half years ago, but that is my personal view.'¹³⁶ Rogers and Mignuolo also believe that there has been a change: '[l]ooking back at David Blunkett's original announcement, it is clear that seven years on the programme is quite different from the vision he originally described'.¹³⁷

The most significant changes in the Academies programme over the last few years can be summarised as:

- The upfront charge for all sponsors has been altered. In the official response to the Third PwC report in 2006 it is stated that sponsors' fees will no longer just contribute to the cost of the building.¹³⁸ There is now an 'endowment model', where sponsors pay £500,000 in their first year and the remaining £1.5 million over the next four years;¹³⁹
- The £2 million sponsorship requirement was dropped in 2006 for universities, schools and colleges wishing to sponsor an Academy. There has been a very proactive recruitment drive over the last year or so for these organisations to become involved with schools generally, especially with Academies and Trust schools;
- Changes to VAT regulations in the 2007 budget mean that Academies can now share their facilities more easily (something envisaged in the original formulation for Academies which they have been unable to do to a large extent);
- Academies are now obliged to follow the national curriculum in English, maths, science and ICT;
- Local authorities are now seemingly more involved with Academies, and can even be co-sponsors;
- New Academies will now be obliged to take excluded pupils from neighbouring schools;
- In June 2008 the *National Challenge* was announced. Any school that has fewer than 30% of their pupils attaining 5 GCSEs A*-C (including English and Maths) has to come up with a strategy for improvement. One option is to become an Academy, and there is funding for another 70 Academies to be created over and above existing plans.
- A number of Academies are becoming involved in the primary school sector either by being an 'all through school' catering for pupils of primary, as well as secondary, age or having feeder primaries under one central management, the 'matrix model'. In addition, there are plans for boarding places at one Academy.

¹³⁶ House of Commons. 'Diversity of schools: Academies', response to Q90.

¹³⁷ Rogers and Mignuolo, *A New Direction*, p. 11.

¹³⁸ DfES. 2006. Department for Education and Skills Response to the Third Annual Report from the PricewaterhouseCoopers Evaluation of the Academies Programme. Nottingham: DfES Publications. p. 7.

¹³⁹ DfES. 2007. *400 Academies: Prospectus for Sponsors and Local Authorities*. Nottingham: DfES Publications. pp. 8-9.

Another change is that private schools are being encouraged to become Academies, but this change will be discussed in a later section of this report.

Even with the more recent changes in policy, Lord Adonis, before he moved departments, reiterated that addressing inequality and disadvantage remains central to the programme, arguing that Academies can provide social mobility:

...we want academies to be run by those with the values and capacity to bring about genuine educational transformation, not simply incremental improvement. My vision is for academies to be in the vanguard of meritocracy for the next generation in the way that grammar schools were for a proportion of the post-war generation – providing a ladder, in particular, for less advantaged children to get on, and gain the very best education and qualifications, irrespective of wealth and family background, but without unfair selection at the age of 11.¹⁴⁰

Again Academies are linked to creating excellence for the disadvantaged – in fact being hailed as in the ‘vanguard of meritocracy’ – and are also seen as a somewhat radical approach, bringing about ‘genuine educational transformation’. This posits Academies as part of an approach which perceives existing school types as insufficient. Interestingly Academies are also presented as a method of social mobility akin to grammar schools’ supposed role in the past, which has connotations of selection which Adonis rebuts. Moreover, Adonis has also said that underperforming schools, especially in disadvantaged areas, are holding back social mobility and that ‘[p]utting this right is a central objective of new Labour - and a reason for accelerating reform.’¹⁴¹

One of the most momentous changes to the policy is a very visible recruitment drive to encourage universities to be more involved in the programme. The government contextualises this as part of its long-term commitment to widening participation in higher education. Yet the focusing on universities and schools as potential sponsors, and the increasing involvement of local authorities, has been greeted with cynicism by some. Chitty believes that it ‘can be seen as a desperate attempt to legitimise the Project in the face of those who have argued that it has been dominated by sponsors from business who know little or nothing about education’;¹⁴² while Ball states that ‘LEAs are now being drawn into the programme as the flow of sponsors dries up’.¹⁴³ Yet despite the enticement of local authorities, schools and universities as sponsors there is still a steady stream of private sponsors for Academies in the feasibility and development stages.

It is also interesting to note that universities and FE colleges potentially could be ‘sponsors’ or co-‘sponsors’ of Academies from the programme’s inception. For example, the University of the West of England (UWE) has been the sponsor of The City Academy Bristol since its opening as a Phase 2 Academy in 2003. The University of Liverpool is a co-sponsor of North Liverpool Academy, which opened in 2006. In 2006 Barnfield FE college sponsored two schools which are scheduled to become Academies in 2009. But the ‘big push’ for universities and independent schools to become involved in Academies did not begin in

¹⁴⁰ Adonis, ‘Academies and social mobility’, p.3.

¹⁴¹ Adonis, ‘Full steam ahead for academies’.

¹⁴² Chitty, C. 2008. ‘The Schools Academies Programme: a new direction or total abandonment?’, *Forum* 50 (1), pp. 23-32. pp. 28-9.

¹⁴³ Ball, S. J. 2008. *The Education Debate*. Bristol: The Policy Press. p. 187.

earnest until 2007, some seven years after the programme's launch. So while this type of sponsor is hardly new to the programme, it appears that they have received much greater encouragement in the past year or so.

This can also be seen as part of a wider 'joined-up' approach of educational institutions tackling inequality, which is now coming from two government departments (DCSF and DIUS). It is thus one way of linking the DCSF's standards agenda to DIUS's widening participation agenda.

The dropping of the requirement to pay £2 million in sponsorship for educational institutions is a significant incentive, and one that seems to have contributed in attracting more universities to become involved in the programme. Yet the level of involvement of universities can vary. Lead sponsorship of an Academy by a university is still rare. Co-sponsorship is more common, but many other universities seem to be merely *partners* as opposed to fully fledged sponsors or co-sponsors.¹⁴⁴

The full extent of the recent changes to the programme is difficult to gauge. Francis Beckett, one of the most vociferous critics of the programme, believes the changes have not been fundamental enough:

The original ideas – that they should be in areas of high deprivation, that sponsors should pay £2 million upfront, that they should be in spanking new buildings, that sponsors should be commercial companies, that local authorities should be squeezed out – have all gone. Unfortunately, so far the most damaging idea – that sponsors should have complete control of the school, in perpetuity, and that it should be entirely outside the democratically controlled state education system – is still there.¹⁴⁵

From a different perspective, Sturdy and Freedman, in a report for the think tank *Policy Exchange*, express concern about the Brown administration's attitude to Academies in general and the appointment of Ed Balls as Secretary of State in particular. They assert that the latter has ceased to use the phrase 'independent state schools' when referring to Academies and believe 'that there has been a clear, if subtle, change in the ethos of the programme that threatens its future value.'¹⁴⁶ They see this perceived loss of freedom as problematic: 'Academies are subject to increasing centralisation and standardisation in building projects, increasing co-sponsorship with local authorities and tighter teaching and curriculum requirements.'¹⁴⁷ Richard Tice, Chair of Governors at Northampton Academy, has produced a report that criticises the continued influence of nationally agreed pay scales and work practices in Academies, as well as the fact that Academies are still subject to review from Independent Appeals Panels for exclusions. He argues for greater freedoms for Academies,

¹⁴⁴ DCSF. 'Balls' academy revolution to bring 'university culture' to schools gathers pace'. For the full list of universities currently involved in the programme see the Appendix to this report

¹⁴⁵ Beckett, F. 2008. *We pay the piper – they call the tune: The story of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust*. Basford: The Russell Press. p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ Sturdy and Freedman, *Choice? What Choice?*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ Sturdy and Freedman, *Choice? What Choice?*, p. 16.

and additionally that the ‘management freedom given to academies should be rolled out across the whole state sector.’¹⁴⁸

Rogers and Mignuolo point out that the latest official prospectus for potential sponsors and local authorities implies a greater role for the latter than in the original model.¹⁴⁹ The prospectus states:

Academies exemplify the new role of local authorities as ‘commissioners’ rather than ‘providers’ of schools. Academies are run on an independent basis, which is critical to their success because of the absolute responsibility this accords their sponsors, principals and governing bodies for their management. There is no passing the buck or unclear lines of accountability. However, most Academies are, in effect, jointly commissioned by the DfES and the relevant local authority on a partnership basis.¹⁵⁰

There is possibly an issue with those Academies developed in the early years with perhaps less involvement of the local authority than might now be the case. Also some have argued that local authorities are somewhat bound to consider Academies in order to procure BSF funding.¹⁵¹ Yet for some, this seemingly significant shift towards greater local authority involvement with Academies goes against one of the central tenets of the programme. Sturdy and Freedman express concern that local authorities will now have a *de facto* veto over potential academies in their localities.¹⁵² Equally alarming for them is the potential *active* involvement of local authorities in Academies: ‘[e]ven where local authorities are prepared to engage with the programme they are increasingly doing so as co-sponsors – which defeats their original purpose: increasing diversity of supply’.¹⁵³

On the other hand, some in local authorities and their schools feel that the balance of power in these schemes is decisively with the Academies. With a few exceptions, such as the proposed change in the status of behaviour partnerships, they have much greater freedom to withdraw from collaborative arrangements than other schools involved in them. This is indicative of tensions produced by independent status.

For a government committed to evidence based policy making, the rather equivocal evidence relating to the programme might perhaps have led to a delay in its expansion. Yet in December 2004 the then Education Secretary, Charles Clarke, stated that, while it would take time to properly assess the impact of the programme, there could not be a delay:

I would say that a proper scientific assessment of the impact of academies could not meaningfully take place for two or three years at least, probably six or seven years of a school cohort going through, to assess what happened. If I am asked to say we should just stop everything and come back to it in seven or eight years’ time, you just cannot operate in that way.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ Tice, R. 2008. *Academies: a model education?* London: Reform. pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁹ Rogers and Mignuolo, *A New Direction*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁰ DfES *400 Academies: Prospectus for Sponsors and Local Authorities*, p. 12.

¹⁵¹ Anti Academies Alliance, *Report on the MPs Committee of enquiry*, p. 34.

¹⁵² Sturdy and Freedman, *Choice? What Choice?*, p. 16.

¹⁵³ Sturdy and Freedman, *Choice? What Choice?*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ House of Commons, ‘Secondary Education’, response to Q50.

However, the Education and Skills Committee found this approach rather concerning:

We recognise that secondary education has failed in some inner city areas and we understand the temptation to believe that Academies are the solution. Yet £5 billion is a lot of money to commit to one programme. The Government could have limited the number of Academies to 30 or 50 and carried out an assessment of their effectiveness before expanding the programme so significantly. Whilst we welcome the Government's desire to invest resources in areas of educational underachievement, we consider that the rapid expansion of the Academy policy comes at the expense of rigorous evaluation.¹⁵⁵

Despite the various changes, there were rumours of dissatisfaction in government with the programme. As mentioned earlier, in November 2007 it emerged that ministers had ordered an 'urgent review' of the Academies programme.¹⁵⁶ Jim Knight, in a written parliamentary answer on November 19th 2007, mentions the review, which included a seminar on Academies held on November 1st 2007, and its confidential status, which is standard with all Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) reports.¹⁵⁷ The details of the review have therefore not been made public so far, but it is believed to have broadly endorsed the programme. The *Financial Times* reported in January 2008 that it was mainly positive: 'Lord Adonis, schools minister, told the FT the internal report showed the schools were "meeting [government] objectives"', reinforcing his "determination to expand the academies programme"¹⁵⁸.

This seeming approval of the policy was emphasised by the announcement by Ed Balls on February 29th 2008 that expansion of the programme would be accelerated by an extra 5 Academies a year over the next two years (totalling 55 new Academies for each year). The DCSF press release about the expansion mentions the PMDU's report and states: 'Proposals announced today build on recommendations in the report'.¹⁵⁹ This expansion has since been superseded by the *National Challenge* with an even greater number of Academies planned to be opened by 2010 than previously envisaged.

The departure of Lord Adonis from the DCSF in the October 2008 reshuffle has not seemingly endangered the programme to the extent that some people predicted. Jim Knight is now the minister responsible for the programme and has reiterated the commitment to opening at least 400 Academies.¹⁶⁰ Therefore Academies appear to remain, along with Trust schools, part of the government's schools innovation and improvement agenda, which

¹⁵⁵ House of Commons, 'Secondary Education', 14 (23).

¹⁵⁶ Curtis, P. 2007. "'Failing" school reforms put Labour under pressure', *The Guardian* November 13th. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/nov/13/schools.news.schools>. Accessed 20/11/2008.

¹⁵⁷ 'The seminar on 1 November was attended by a number of officials and a range of stakeholders in academies programme. The Department considers release of the names and organisations of those taking part in the seminar would have an inhibiting effect on the free and frank discussions required in policy reviews and would disrupt our ability to meet our wider objectives.' Knight, 2008. Written Answer. Hansard November 19th. Column 624W.

¹⁵⁸ Barker, A., and Turner, D. 2008. 'Academy schools win clean bill of health', *Financial Times* January 31st. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/80e54f18-d029-11dc-9309-0000779fd2ac.html>. Accessed 05/02/2008.

¹⁵⁹ http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0036.

¹⁶⁰ Knight, J. 2008. Written Answer. Hansard October 9th, Column 805W.

includes involving universities more with schools as part of the work of the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE).¹⁶¹

Summary

The Academies programme's apparent endorsement by the PMDU review and its subsequent acceleration means that Academies will remain part of the schools' landscape for some time to come. It has survived a change in prime minister and a succession of Secretaries of State, and is now also supported by the Conservative party. Furthermore, the prominent role of Academies in the *National Challenge* has kept Academies at the heart of the government's schools policy.

With the various changes to the programme highlighted in this section, there is a danger that it will not fully satisfy anyone, with long-standing critics suggesting that the changes are not fundamental enough, and with others, such as the Conservatives, believing that key parts of the policy have been lost. Yet these changes have addressed some of the deficiencies of the programme and they have certainly been welcomed by some observers, even while others remain unconvinced.

¹⁶¹ National Council for Educational Excellence. 2008. *National Council for Educational Excellence: Recommendations*. Annesley: DCSF publications.

4. Emerging Models of Academies

This section looks at the diversification of the Academies programme. While there had been some homogeneity in Academies in the beginning, there are now a range of models. The original model(s) of Academies either replacing a failing school or being a new school in a disadvantaged area, with a private sponsor and a radical new build with innovative buildings, are no longer the sole types of Academy. This section outlines the various different models and characteristics of Academies. It then examines the emerging ‘Academy chains’ and the increasing involvement of universities, independent schools and local authorities with the programme.

4.1. Different models of Academies

With the independence of Academies and the potential for innovation being emphasised, especially at the beginning of the programme, it is perhaps inevitable that there would not be one single type of Academy. The more recent developments mean that there are other types of Academies emerging. The various of models of Academies are outlined below:

Figure 1. Different models of Academies

Models	Description
An Academy replacing a ‘failing’ school	A ‘failing’ school or schools become an Academy.
A new school in an area of disadvantage	An Academy is created without a predecessor school in an area of low educational achievement.
Conversion model(s)	‘Successful’ schools, such CTCs and independent schools, convert to Academy status, and in the future may include grammar schools too.
A <i>National Challenge</i> school	A ‘failing’ school gets extra funding and becomes an Academy.

The original model(s) involved either a ‘failing’ school, or a number of ‘failing’ schools, becoming an Academy or a new school being established in an area of disadvantage. Part of this process entailed having a new build, although this has been extended to all state schools under the *Building Schools for the Future* programme. The conversion model(s), however, are very different propositions. These tend to be highly achieving schools. It is perhaps natural that most CTCs are converting to Academies, considering their influence on the original policy. In contrast, the use of Academies as a pathway for independent schools to come into the state sector has many other implications for New Labour’s approach to schools. While Academies have been used as a way for schools to embrace the private sector and have more independence, this particular model allows current fee paying independent schools to come into the state sector, and cede some of their autonomy, for example having to follow the core national curriculum and not charging fees. Although no maintained grammar schools

have yet converted to an Academy, there is an instance where this is being proposed.¹⁶² Finally, one option open to the 638 schools identified by the *National Challenge* as achieving below the target of 5 GCSEs A*-C (including English and maths) is to become an Academy (or alternatively become a Trust or join a federation). This is similar to the original Academy model of replacing a failing school, although the process appears to be somewhat accelerated. Extra money will be made available and an individual school can be awarded up to one million pounds to help raise achievement. The DCSF has budgeted for up to 70 additional Academies to those currently planned. At the time of writing three *National Challenge* schools have announced that they planned to become Academies.¹⁶³

Whereas the majority of sponsors were originally from the private sector; public and third sector organisations have become increasingly involved. Figure 2 below outlines different types of sponsors.

Figure 2. Sponsor type

Sponsorship	Description
Private (individual)	A wealthy individual sponsors one or more Academy.
Private (organisation)	A company or other organisation sponsors one or more Academy.
Educational Companies (not for profit)	An organisation is established that sponsors a number of schools. These can be subsidiaries of other organisations; for example the United Learning Trust is a subsidiary of the United Church Schools Trust.
Successful Schools	A successful (usually independent) school sponsors or co-sponsors an Academy.
FE colleges, Universities	An FE college or university sponsors or co-sponsors an Academy.
Local Authorities	A local authority co-sponsors an Academy (it cannot be lead sponsor).

The original Academies mainly had individual sponsors. Hatcher notes how there have been relatively few companies involved in the programme and that they only represent approximately 10% of all Academy sponsors.¹⁶⁴ The emergence of specially created companies or trusts sponsoring chains of Academies may be a key development in the programme as it expands. The sponsorship by universities and successful (usually independent) schools is an indication that there is a desire for some Academies to be sponsored by organisations with educational expertise, although a small number of universities were involved in the programme before the recent recruitment drive. A further

¹⁶² Henry, J. 2008. 'Merger may close grammar school', *The Sunday Telegraph* October 12th, p. 14.

¹⁶³ DCSF. 2008. 'Three National Challenge Schools to Become Academies'. October 13th 2008/0227.

¹⁶⁴ Hatcher, R. 2008. 'Academies and diplomas: two strategies for shaping the future workforce', *Oxford Review of Education* 34 (6), pp. 665-676. p. 670.

distinction should also be made between sponsors and *donors*. The latter can donate money to an Academy, but can remain anonymous.¹⁶⁵

Different sponsorship structures in Academies are set out in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Sponsorship structure

Sponsorship	Description
Single school, single sponsor	One sponsor (either an individual or organisation) runs a single Academy.
Single school, multiple sponsors	Two or more sponsors (either individuals or organisations) run an Academy.
Multiple schools, one sponsor	One sponsor (either an individual or organisation) sponsors more than one Academy.
A chain of schools (at least five), one sponsor	A development of the above sponsorship structure where sponsors look to establish a ‘chain’ of Academies. Five such organisations are currently sponsoring at least five Academies.
Local Authority co-ordination of a number of Academies	A local authority co-ordinates the establishment of a number of Academies in a locality, in some cases acting as co-sponsor. There is a distinction between this developing as an organic process (Kent, City of London) and as a more co-ordinated strategy (Manchester, Sunderland, Birmingham) where a batch open simultaneously.

The early Academies with (mainly) individuals sponsors have the ‘classic’ sponsorship structure, which still continues but is less prevalent. As the programme has developed different sponsorship structures have emerged.

One of the first distinctions between different types of Academies sponsorship made was whether the sponsor of an Academy was involved in more than one of the schools. The third PwC evaluation outlines two models of Academies on this basis: ‘those which are isolated institutions and those that are part of a broader network’. They find a difference in performance between the two:

The evidence suggests that Academies in each of these groups are beginning to exhibit different characteristics and approaches to learning. For example, those with multiple Academy sponsorship seem, based on the survey evidence, more likely than those with single Academy sponsorship to focus on teaching and learning and on the basics of behaviour, discipline and uniform and less likely to have engaged extensively with other schools in the local area.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Beckett, F. and Evans, R. 2008. ‘Who’s making the wishes come true?’, *The Guardian* Education section June 10th, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶⁶ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 3rd Annual Report*, p. 56.

Chains of Academies, for example the 14 Academies sponsored by the United Learning Trust, took longer to establish. Adonis stated that by 2008 there were 40 sponsors involved with more than one Academy (either open or in the pipeline) and he believed that the emergence of 'Academy chains' was an important development in the programme.¹⁶⁷ These Academy chains are examined in more detail shortly. The development of increasing local authority involvement, in some cases as co-sponsor, changes the programme somewhat, but this level of involvement is by no means standard in all of the new Academies.

4.2. Academy chains

This section will look at five organisations who are currently sponsors of at least five Academies that are either open or due to open shortly. In addition, a Swedish company, Kunskapsskolan, which plans to open a substantial number of Academies in England, is also briefly examined. The ethos of each organisation and how they co-ordinate their Academies are outlined below.

United Learning Trust

The United Learning Trust (ULT), a Christian educational charity, is currently the largest sponsor of Academies. At present they sponsor 14 Academies (with a further three proposed). It is a subsidiary company of the United Church Schools Trust (UCST), which runs 12 independent schools. Their Academies include William Hulme Grammar School, which is a converted independent school. The UCST list the following points among their core values:

As a Group, we are non-denominational: we welcome pupils of all faiths and none to our schools. UCST was founded in the Church of England on the principles of respect, service and compassion.

We seek to maximise every individual's potential, nurturing the self-confidence and self-esteem that will enable them to make the most of their talents.¹⁶⁸

Not only do the ULT co-ordinate management of their fourteen Academies, but also encourage collaboration with the UCST's twelve independent schools:

Both the independent fee-paying schools and academies stimulate each other's performance through joint training, curriculum development and their approach to a relentless agenda of improvement.¹⁶⁹

In terms of specialism, eleven of the fourteen open ULT Academies have at least one of their specialisms in business and/or enterprise, but only two have one of these subjects as their sole specialism. Six have at least one specialism in core subjects such as maths and science, and two have languages as a specialism.

¹⁶⁷ Adonis, 'Academies and social mobility', pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁸ United Learning Trust website. <http://www.ucstrust.org.uk/about-us/view/40/Our-core-values>. Accessed 10/10/2008.

¹⁶⁹ United Learning Trust website. <http://www.ult.org.uk/faq.asp>. Accessed 10/10/2008.

Francis Beckett suggests that there is a good argument that the USCT is the most powerful organisation in the secondary sector and believes that the central co-ordination of the schools detracts from local accountability.¹⁷⁰

In terms of attainment, only one of the eight ULT Academies with GCSE results in 2007 reached the *National Challenge* target, with a further two having at least 25% of pupils achieving five good GCSEs including English and maths.

Oasis: Community Learning

Oasis currently has the second largest number of open Academies. Between 2007 and 2008 it opened nine Academies, and has another in the feasibility stage. It is a Christian organisation and this informs their ethos:

Our ethos is an expression of our character it is a statement of who we are and therefore the lens through which we assess all we do. Our work is motivated and inspired by the life, message and example of Christ, which shapes and guides every aspect of each of our schools.¹⁷¹

Of the nine Oasis Academies that are open, seven have business and/or enterprise as a specialism.

The extent of the central management/co-ordination of Oasis Academies is unclear, but there is a general emphasis on collaboration, with each Academy being described as: ‘a partnership between Oasis Community Learning, the DfES (sic) and the local LEA.’¹⁷²

There was an incident involving a pupil demonstration in October 2008 at a recently opened Oasis Academy (Mayfield in Southampton).¹⁷³ The local MP, and Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, John Denham questioned the experience of the Oasis:

Clearly the Oasis Trust nationally is a very inexperienced organisation. This is only the second year it’s responsible for any schools anywhere in the country. They may need to look at how they can get in some more expertise in to strengthen, not the head teacher, who I know well and was a successful head teacher elsewhere in the city, but the governance of the school.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Beckett, F. 2008. ‘Too much power?’, *The Guardian* May 13th.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/may/13/schools.newschools>. Accessed 24/07/08.

¹⁷¹ Oasis: Community Learning. 2008. *Purpose, Ethos and Values*.

<http://www.oasiscommunitylearning.org/documents/OCLPurposeEthosValues-LATESTVERSION-31.05.pdf>. Accessed 13/10/2008.

¹⁷² Oasis: Community Learning. 2008. *Purpose, Ethos and Values*.

<http://www.oasiscommunitylearning.org/documents/OCLPurposeEthosValues-LATESTVERSION-31.05.pdf>. Accessed 13/10/2008.

¹⁷³ Marley, D. 2008. ‘Pupils go on “rampage” at new Academy’, *Times Educational Supplement* October 24th

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6004180>. Accessed 25/10/08.

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Smith, M. 2008. ‘Oasis Academy Mayfield needs experts says John Denham’, *Southern Daily Echo* October 22nd, http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/3781018.School_needs_troubleshooters/. Accessed 4/10/08.

The head teacher has subsequently resigned along with a number of other staff.¹⁷⁵ The full details of the difficulties at the school have yet to emerge, so whether the organisation expanded too quickly by opening nine Academies in little over a year is a matter for conjecture.

Harris Federation

As of September 2008 there are seven open Harris Academies, and they are looking to expand to a total of twelve in the next two years.¹⁷⁶ The Chairman of the federation, Lord Harris of Peckham, was involved in the CTC movement and the Harris City Technology College in Croydon opened in 1990 (and converted to an Academy in 2007). The Harris Federation aim to ‘create a culture of self-belief, high aspiration and high achievement for every student’.¹⁷⁷

The main board of the federation is chaired by Lord Harris and is comprised of the chair of governors from each individual Academy and other non-executive directors. The organisation’s website asserts that this does not encroach on an individual Academy’s autonomy: ‘[t]his structure allows the Federation to provide central strategic direction whilst maintaining localness.’¹⁷⁸ The relationship between the individual schools and the central organisation is described in the following way:

Every academy operates in its own way with its own Principal and Academy Governing Body (AGB). The Principal is responsible for the day-to-day running of the academy and they report to their local Governing Body and the Board of the Harris Federation of South London Schools on which every local Governing Body Chair sits.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Carson, W. 2008. ‘As Ruth Johnson quits the Oasis Academy Mayfield - the Echo reveals a further 19 staff have given their notice’, *Southern Daily Echo* November 25th, http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/education/3875451.Head_teacher_quits_as_19_staff_hand_in_their_notice/. Accessed 08/12/08.

¹⁷⁶ Harris Federation website. 2008. <http://www.harrisfederation.org.uk/index.php?page=vision>. Accessed 13/08/2008.

¹⁷⁷ Harris Federation website. 2008. <http://www.harrisfederation.org.uk/index.php?page=academies#bermondsey>. Accessed 13/08/2008.

¹⁷⁸ Harris Federation website. 2008. <http://www.harrisfederation.org.uk/index.php?page=vision>. Accessed 13/08/2008.

¹⁷⁹ Harris Federation website. 2008. <http://www.harrisfederation.org.uk/index.php?page=about>. Accessed 13/08/2008.

Aside from Academies, the Harris Federation also currently includes seven specialist secondary schools and four pilot specialist primary schools. The organisation outlines its strategic rationale as:¹⁸⁰

- A structure for efficient management of multiple Academies
- Consistency
- Optimum use of resources and experience
- Succession Planning by Sponsor
- Strength in the face of political change
- New Entrants – ready made structure
- Brand Identity – One strong united voice – issues championed by Sponsor/CEO

The mooted benefits of this federation include: sharing best practice; cross-federation working groups; support networks of newly qualified teachers; and economies of scale (i.e. central management reduces costs).

All the Harris Academies have business and/or enterprise as one of their specialisms.

Two of the four Harris Academies with GCSE results in 2007 hit the *National Challenge* target, with another coming relatively close (28%).

Absolute Return for Kids

The company Absolute Return for Kids (ARK) currently has six open Academies, and is looking to have a total of 12 open by 2012.¹⁸¹ The organisation was founded in 2004 to tackle educational underachievement. Their ethos focuses on core subjects:

ARK applies fundamental principles in all its academies. Staff and students are expected to aim for the highest standards of behaviour, conduct and achievement. ARK focuses on the basics of reading, writing and mathematics as a foundation for success in all subjects¹⁸²

ARK schools are organised into a number of ‘small schools’ to help foster communities and the organisation is aiming to, where local arrangements permit, develop all through schools.

All ARK schools have specialist status in maths, and their emphasis on curriculum is in contrast to some of the other chains:

¹⁸⁰ Harris Federation website. 2008. <http://www.harrisfederation.org.uk/index.php?page=about>. Accessed 13/08/2008.

¹⁸¹ See the ARK website: http://www.arkonline.org/projects/uk_education1/ark_school.html. Accessed 24/07/08.

¹⁸² ARK website: <http://www.arkonline.org/?p=51&page=2>. Accessed 16/10/08.

English and mathematics are the foundation for all other subjects and are critical to success at school and in life. Our academies aim to develop strong readers and communicators who love to use their skills and children who are confident working with numbers in everyday life. Our curriculum is designed and structured to ensure that all children master essential knowledge in these core subjects.¹⁸³

The one ARK Academy with GCSE results in 2007 hit the *National Challenge* target.

The British Edutrust Foundation

One of the more recently established chains is The British Edutrust Foundation (Edutrust), which has one open Academy and a further eight in various stages of development. It describes itself as a charity ‘which has been established to promote educational excellence in schools’.¹⁸⁴ It claims to provide a somewhat different type of Academy:

Edutrust has a new approach to academies, working in genuine collaboration with all partners to raise educational standards and the aspirations of young people through creative opportunities and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.¹⁸⁵

The organisation seems to be committed to provide a diversity of specialisms, including maths (in at least three), and none are currently planning to offer business and/or enterprise as a specialism. It emphasises the schools’ relationship with local communities and promises to share the facilities of each of its Academies.

“Kunskapsskolan” – A Swedish model for Academies?

With the Conservative party championing the Swedish model of secondary schooling,¹⁸⁶ it is worth noting that one Swedish company has expressed interest in opening a number of Academies in England. Kunskapsskolan, which translates as ‘knowledge school’, is the largest private education company in Sweden and is apparently looking to sponsor up to 30 Academies in England by 2018.¹⁸⁷

The ethos of Kunskapsskolan schools emphasise personalised learning, giving pupils a greater input in their learning and getting them to set their own targets. As Academy sponsors Kunskapsskolan would not be able to make a profit from the venture and would be likely to have the £2 million sponsorship fee waived. They are also looking to open a small number of ‘low-fee independent schools in England alongside its academies.’¹⁸⁸ There are precedents for companies to run independent schools alongside Academies, such as ULT and the Haberdashers’ Livery Company, and Steiners is also attempting to do so. Adonis

¹⁸³ See the ARK website: <http://www.arkschools.org/pages/ark-schools/ark-academies/the-ark-schools-ethos.php>. Accessed 16/10/08.

¹⁸⁴ Edutrust website. <http://www.edutrust.org/index.asp>. Accessed 14/10/2008.

¹⁸⁵ Edutrust website. <http://www.edutrust.org/index.asp>. Accessed 14/10/2008.

¹⁸⁶ Gove, ‘Freeing good schools to help the most disadvantaged’.

¹⁸⁷ Stewart, W. 2008. ‘Swedes bring personal touch to academies’, *Times Educational Supplement* April 4th. <http://www.tes.co.uk/2599527>. Accessed 14/07/08.

¹⁸⁸ Stewart, ‘Swedes bring personal touch to academies’.

described Kunskapsskolan as bringing ‘the successful Swedish independent school model to Britain’, and claimed that it was ‘a seminal moment for English education’.¹⁸⁹

Implications of Academy chains

Academy chains could potentially be a positive development in the Academies programme by pooling resources and accruing educational expertise. Some may have missions that seek to address some of the possible shortcomings of the programme. For example, ARK strive to focus on curriculum, prioritising maths in particular by having it as a specialism in each of its schools, while Edutrust promises to build partnerships with local communities.

However, there is a risk that in such chains certain management decisions are taken away from schools, a charge sometimes levelled against local authority maintained schools by proponents of the programme. This perhaps goes against the original idea of Academies being individual schools with a large degree of autonomy.

4.3. Universities’ involvement with Academies

Although Trust schools are examined in more detail in the next section, they are also mentioned here because they have been featured alongside Academies in recent DCSF/DIUS campaigns to attract sponsors. The concerted effort to involve universities with both the Academies and Trust programmes resulted in the launch on October 10th 2007 of a prospectus for collaboration between universities and schools. In a press release Lord Adonis said: ‘[t]he change in sponsorship rules means that there’s now no barrier to universities applying their educational expertise, ethos and organisation to benefit a secondary school. It’s their academic excellence and commitment that we desire.’¹⁹⁰ The NCCE recommended that higher education institutions should work more closely with schools, including ‘supporting’ Academies and Trusts.¹⁹¹ In a DCSF press notice in September 2008 it was announced that 45¹⁹² out of England’s 88 universities would either sponsor or partner an Academy.¹⁹³ This includes seven out of the 16 English universities in the Russell Group.¹⁹⁴ It is reported that Oxford and Cambridge have so far resisted sponsoring an Academy.¹⁹⁵ The two universities are said to have found issues with the potential conflict of interest when it came to admissions from a school which is sponsored by them, as well as the danger that the Academy could fail.¹⁹⁶ They are also keen to maintain good relationships with a wide range of schools.

¹⁸⁹ Grimston, J. 2008. ‘Pupils to set their own timetables as Britain adopts Swedish-style academies’, *The Times* April 5th. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/education/article3689895.ece>. Accessed 14/07/08

¹⁹⁰ DIUS. 2007. ‘Government calls on universities to partner schools to tap into talent’, Press Notice October 13th.

¹⁹¹ National Council for Educational Excellence, *National Council for Educational Excellence: Recommendations*.

¹⁹² For a full list of university sponsors see Appendix.

¹⁹³ DCSF. ‘Balls’ academy revolution to bring ‘university culture’ to schools gathers pace’.

¹⁹⁴ Currently the following seven Russell Group universities involved in the Academies programme: University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, Imperial College London, Kings College London, University of Liverpool, University College London, and University of Warwick.

¹⁹⁵ Curtis, P. 2008. ‘Universities urged to back more academies to reduce class bias’, *The Guardian* February 11th. <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/news/story/0,,2255542,00.html>. Accessed 13/02/2008.

¹⁹⁶ Curtis, P. and Wintour, P. 2007. ‘Oxbridge snub to government on academies’, *The Guardian* December 3rd. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/dec/03/highereducation.politics>. Accessed 12/01/2008.

As noted earlier, the government's push since summer 2007 to get the higher education sector more involved with schools 'of all types', but specifically Academies and Trusts, is firmly contextualised within the discourse of widening participation. The government's prospectus for higher education involvement in Academies and Trusts states:

For universities, direct engagement with secondary education is the next step to widening participation. The Government would like every secondary school to have a higher education partnership, in recognition of the importance of universities' crucial leadership role. For universities, close and sustained co-operation with individual schools will build on existing partnerships, offers a chance to prepare students from particular communities for higher education and to inspire them to apply.¹⁹⁷

The prospectus outlines three ways universities can collaborate with schools:

- To become the **lead sponsor** of a new academy.
- To become a **co-sponsor** of a new academy, providing significant support through transfer of educational expertise, but looking to other sponsors to lead on other aspects of the school's development.
- To **support** a trust school.¹⁹⁸

The difference between being lead- and co- sponsor of an Academy is rather significant. The above suggests that co-sponsorship would entail mainly utilising a university's educational expertise, whereas being lead sponsor would involve other management responsibilities. This links to debates discussed earlier in relation to Academy sponsors – the relative importance of leadership qualities and pedagogic contribution. Universities UK identify a further category of university involvement with Academies: 'partnership short of sponsorship'. This is where a link with an Academy is established without the 'attendant levels of responsibility'. The extent of this type of involvement can itself vary.¹⁹⁹

The government's own prospectus goes on to list what universities can contribute to either an Academy or a Trust school:

¹⁹⁷ DCSF & DIUS, *Academies, Trusts and Higher Education: prospectus*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ DCSF & DIUS, *Academies, Trusts and Higher Education: prospectus*, p. 10. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁹⁹ Universities UK. [Forthcoming] 2009. *Higher Education Institutions Engaging with Academies and Trust Schools*. UUK Pamphlet. pp. 12-3.

- creation of a strong **educational vision** for the school;
- contribution to robust **governance and leadership**;
- ongoing **professional development for staff** to improve teaching and learning and encourage recruitment;
- ongoing **support and mentoring for students**, including ‘learning to learn’ and specialist support for Gifted and Talented students;
- development of **curriculum specialism(s)**;
- **raising student aspirations** to post-16 study and higher education, dispelling myths about HE and dismantling perceived barriers to higher education participation;
- facilitating visits by **student ambassadors** to raise aspirations and act as role models;
- **developing knowledge and understanding of tomorrow’s HE student** – how and what they learn in school, what their expectations of higher education might be and how HE should respond;
- access to **university resources and facilities**, for example shared use of sports facilities, educational software, libraries.

While a university contributing to a school can be seen as positive step, it has to be noted that the Academies programme remains (even after recent changes) a contentious policy politically. On the other hand, the Trust schools policy seems to have become less so, largely because these schools remain in the state maintained sector. Universities may be reluctant to face a local campaign against an Academy proposal, like the one in Camden against a proposed Academy to be sponsored by University College London (UCL) (see case-study below). In addition, not everyone may see universities as appropriate sponsors. Curtis and Wintour assert that Sir Cyril Taylor, former chairperson of the SSAT, has reservations about universities being involved in the programme and that he: ‘questioned whether universities were capable of turning round failing schools. Their expertise was “research and academia”, he said, rather than “taking over” struggling inner-city schools.’²⁰⁰ To some extent, the Oxbridge resistance to sponsoring Academies is based on a similar argument about the ‘core business’ of universities.

²⁰⁰ Curtis and Wintour, ‘Oxbridge snub to government on academies’.

Case-study – The proposed Camden Academy sponsored by UCL

The Provost of UCL, Malcolm Grant, believes that a university can offer a great deal to a school and implies that this was missing in the original Academies model:

We were puzzled by the original academy model. It provided for an injection of private capital of £2m to leverage significant additional funding from the Treasury. We came to the view that an asset of far greater value was the intellectual capital that a university could bring to a school.²⁰¹

The proposed Academy will be non-selective and specialise in maths, science and languages. There will be parent and staff representation on the governing body, and it will be part of the local family of schools.

Yet universities sponsoring Academies can provoke unrest and there has been a sustained campaign against the proposed Academy in Camden. Generally sponsorship can be seen as endorsing a controversial government policy and Hodges asserts: '[o]ther universities have also come in for flak for supporting academies – though none have encountered the level of opposition being shown in Camden. Like UCL, they have no ideological commitment to academies, simply a desire to help.'²⁰²

Opponents of the Academy in Camden question the amount of consultation in the scheme, especially with regards to its location. For example, former minister Frank Dobson is critical of this:

As someone who has been urging them [UCL] to become more engaged locally, I am not opposed to them being involved but they refused to take part in any of the discussion on the need for another school until it was announced there was to be an academy – and they were to be the sponsors. They have said they want to help a deprived area but not many people would put the area around Swiss Cottage in the deprived category.²⁰³

There are also fears that the Academy might eventually become selective, despite assurances to the contrary. The University and College Union (UCU) states: 'once an academy is set up, UCL would be under no obligation to abide by such a promise.'²⁰⁴

Leaders of some universities have advocated engagement with the policy even though some of their staff vehemently disagree with it. Drummond Bone, vice-chancellor of the University of Liverpool, remembers the reaction to the university sponsoring an Academy in the city:

²⁰¹ Grant, M. 2007. 'Natural Progression', *The Guardian* November 13th.

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,2213577,00.html>. Accessed 15/11/2007.

²⁰² Hodges, L. 2008. 'Conflict rules in Camden: The Academy that sparked a political storm', *The Independent* February 28th. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher/conflict-rules-in-camden-the-academy-that-sparked-a-political-storm-788330.html>. Accessed 02/03/2008.

²⁰³ Quoted in Hodges, 'Conflict rules in Camden'.

²⁰⁴ <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/unions/UCU/cityacademy/>

There was quite intense opposition. We met it up front and tried to persuade people that an academy would be a better solution than what they had before. You are faced with children in a particular area who have received extremely poor schooling. The question is do you opt for something that is available to you to improve that schooling or do you struggle on in the hope of what you think might be a yet better solution?²⁰⁵

He says of the opposition now that '[i]t's nice to say that it seems to have gone away'.

The UCU opposes the Academies programme, with general secretary Sally Hunt stating 'UCU members are not convinced that an academy programme which creates pockets of privilege is the best way to improve the life chances of all our children or to ensure that opportunities in higher education are available to all based on ability.'²⁰⁶

Unions in the schools sector are also dubious about the programme. At the annual conference of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) in March 2008, Academies were described as the 'most serious threat' ever faced by the education system. The delegates voted unanimously to ballot members about strike action on the issue. Their issues of concern with Academies include private sponsors' involvement in aspects of the curriculum, the possibility of exempting the school from national agreements on pay and conditions, and also the potential to not recognise unions. One delegate believes that '[t]he state education system is being dismantled and repackaged into pseudo-commercial units in the form of academy schools.'²⁰⁷ This suggests that not only are Academies a condensate of New Labour policy, but, in this case, a battlefield on which to fight certain contentious issues about New Labour education policies.

4.4. Local authority co-ordination of Academies

There has been greater involvement of local authorities with Academies in recent years, sometimes as co-sponsors. Rogers and Migniuolo list seven local authorities currently co-sponsoring Academies:²⁰⁸

- Kent County Council (5 out of 9 in the area);
- Sunderland (all 3);
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (the only Academy in the area);
- Coventry (the only Academy in the area);
- Telford and Wrekin (the only Academy in the area);
- The Corporation of London (3 Academies in 3 London Boroughs);
- Manchester (6 out of 8 in the city).

This involvement has led in some cases to local authorities co-ordinating the setting up of a number of Academies across counties, such as Kent, and cities, as in Sunderland and Manchester. The latter example is explored in the case-study box below. This potentially

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Hodges, 'Conflict rules in Camden'.

²⁰⁶ <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2994>.

²⁰⁷ Cassidy, S. 2008. 'Teachers threaten to strike in protest at Academies', *The Independent* 26th March. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teachers-threaten-to-strike-in-protest-at-academies-800597.html>. Accessed 05/05/2008.

²⁰⁸ Rogers and Migniuolo, *A New Direction*, p. 15.

enables a more holistic approach by coordinating the contribution of a number of Academies in a locality.

In Sunderland Estelle Morris notes how three new Academies in the city were developed with local businessmen, have the local authority as a co-sponsor and that the sponsors are keen to be part of the local partnership of schools:

The aim is that all the children will get the best of both worlds - the outside expertise and experience that the sponsors bring won't be felt only in the academies, and the commitment to collaboration will remain for all the city's schools. There's no doubt it is some way from the original academy concept, but credit is due on all sides to those who created this local solution.²⁰⁹

Morris sees this 'Sunderland Model' as creating a precedent that was embraced in the changes to the programme in summer 2007. While she doubts that as much government effort will be put into the scheme as in the early days, she believes that: 'the gentle steering of the programme in a slightly different direction is a good thing.'

²⁰⁹ Morris, E. 2007. 'A declaration of independence', *The Guardian* September 25th.
<http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,2175911,00.html>. Accessed 11/11/2007.

Case-study – The ‘Manchester Model’ of Academies

One of the most ambitious local authority-wide strategies involving Academies is the proposed ‘Manchester Model’. It has its origins in the City Council’s *21st Century Education Partnership Programme*, which looks to co-ordinate local businesses and the city’s schools, including six new Academies (the city has two already). The programme is supported by three existing strategies: *Building Schools for the Future*, Academies, and the government’s skills agenda.²¹⁰ The leader of Manchester City Council, Sir Richard Leese, negotiated the collaboration with Lord Adonis:

The agreement will lead to the development of eight Academies in the city, six of them geared specifically to employment generation priorities for the city, with sponsors secured by Manchester City Council from each of these sectors. The Academies are spread fairly evenly across the city, each of them to act as a ‘hub’ for its specialist centre of excellence. Manchester City Council is underwriting the sponsorship and will establish a city-wide ‘Transforming Educational Outcomes Trust’ – bringing together the lead sponsors and other partners, including Manchester’s universities.²¹¹

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Manchester Model is the distribution of specialisms. Each of the six schools will have a different specialism, and local employers in the relevant fields will be connected to the Academy with that specialism. The specialisms are:

- health and bioscience;
- construction and the built environment;
- leisure, travel and tourism;
- finance and professional services;
- creative and media; and
- digital communications.

These specialisms were developed in response to skills shortages or growth areas in the city. The Academies, as the above suggests, will act as ‘hubs’ to other local schools.

It remains unclear what would happen if an Academy decided, as it might, that continuing collaboration was not in its interests and how the local authority would manage this situation and its knock-on effects on other schools.

Both the Sunderland and Manchester Models are interesting examples of a more strategic approach to the development of Academies and collaboration between various stakeholders. The progress of these Academies, especially their relationship with other (non-Academy) local schools, will need to be carefully monitored.

²¹⁰ Manchester City Council. 2006. *Manchester’s Education Partnership Launch: Building Tomorrow’s Workforce, Developing Tomorrow’s Citizen*. http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/BSF_Prospectus.pdf. Accessed 20/03/2008.

²¹¹ DfES, *400 Academies: Prospectus for Sponsors and Local Authorities*, pp. 12-13.

4.5. Successful schools' involvement with Academies

Another intriguing development in the Academies programme is the increasing efforts to involve independent schools. While successful schools from the state sector can also sponsor Academies, it is the participation of those from the independent sector that has drawn the most attention.

Independent schools are being attracted to the programme through two routes. The first is through sponsorship, the second through conversion. Much has been made of the notion of educational DNA that, in context of the Academies programme, both sponsors and independent schools are mooted as giving.²¹² Involvement between the two sectors has been increasingly encouraged in general. The Independent State School Partnerships (ISSP) organisation espouse the benefits of this: '[w]e believe the growth of Independent/State School links can be a rich source of energy to achieve more diversity and greater choice, with emerging 'Commonwealths' of Schools acting together yet remaining distinctive.'²¹³

In the DCSF's prospectus for independent schools to sponsor Academies, it states how the independent sector has been the 'focus of excellence' for some time.²¹⁴ It then outlines how, as with universities, independent schools can become a lead or co-sponsor of an Academy, or be a partner with a Trust school. In addition, independent schools can also convert to Academy status themselves: 'maintaining the benefits of their autonomy, ethos and leadership, but ceasing to charge fees.'²¹⁵ Lord Adonis asserted that by October 2007 20 independent schools are already involved in Academies as sponsors or partners, totalling involvement in 47 Academies between them.²¹⁶

Two of the conditions of independent schools becoming Academies are that they cease to charge fees and that their admissions arrangements are in line with the School Admissions Code. In September 2007, two independent schools became Academies, William Hulme's Grammar School in Manchester and Belvedere Senior School in Liverpool. Two others, Colston Girls and Bristol Cathedral School, will follow in September 2008. All four are ex-direct grant schools and the DCSF prospectus says of the first two how '[b]oth schools had been direct grant schools until the mid-1970s, and both see themselves as pioneering modern versions of the direct grant scheme.'²¹⁷ However, they are certainly not failing schools in the sense understood at the start of the Academies programme, though the pioneering approach to needs-blind entry by Belvedere does suggest that there may be ways of making their intakes even more inclusive than they were even in their direct grant days.²¹⁸

²¹² For example, Lord Adonis told the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) annual conference in October 2007: '[i]t is your educational DNA we are seeking, not your fee income or your existing charitable endowments.' Adonis, Speech to HMC Annual Conference, p. 16.

²¹³ Independent State Schools Partnerships. 2006. *Independent State Schools Partnerships Forum – Report to Ministers January 2006*.

http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/9908/Forum%20report%20to%20Ministers%202006_Final.doc. Accessed 02/12/2007. p. 5.

²¹⁴ DCSF. 2007. *Academies and independent schools: prospectus*, Annesley: DCSF Publications. p. 5.

²¹⁵ DCSF, *Academies and independent schools: prospectus*, p. 11.

²¹⁶ Adonis, Speech to HMC Annual Conference, p. 16.

²¹⁷ DCSF, *Academies and independent schools: prospectus*, p. 12.

²¹⁸ Smithers, A. and Robinson, P. 2006. *Five Years On: Open Access to Independent Education*. Research produced on behalf of the Sutton Trust and the Girls' Day School Trust.

In the same way that cynicism has been expressed about universities being encouraged to become involved with Academies and Trusts at a time when top-up fees are being discussed, similar points could be made about the drive to encourage independent schools to become involved in Academies when their charitable status is under review. More generally, Sam Freedman, head of research at the Independent Schools Council, is rather dubious about the reasons for an independent school to convert to an Academy: 'I can't think of any school that would do it for an ideological reason. The only reason to do it would be if you were not going to survive financially.'²¹⁹ Geoff Lucas, General Secretary of the HMC, states that while they are not encouraging members to become Academies, it may be the only option for some: '[w]e are not against academies. We have been as positive as we can be. For some schools it is a way of securing their long-term future. For some, the old direct grant schools, it is attractive because it is a return to their roots.'²²⁰

Yet it is not just schools from the independent sector that are seeking to become involved in the programme. Successful state schools can also sponsor Academies. The most significant example of this idea can be seen in proposals from Outwood Grange College (currently a Trust school), based in Wakefield. This school plans to sponsor a chain of ten Academies, which would include the school itself converting to Academy status, although this was apparently not a requirement. The executive principal of the school's current federation, Michael Wilkins, believes they have much to offer:

We are a state-school solution for state schools. Our underlying philosophy, which is very different from most academies, is that we don't have anything to do with selection – front or back door. We recognise the unions, we don't want a longer working week, and we don't do anything detrimental to any other school or pupil in the area.²²¹

A state school having such a prominent role in the Academies programme would perhaps be an important landmark and a recognition that there are also successful schools with leadership potential in the mainstream state sector.

Summary

There has been a diversification in types of Academies from the original programme. Local authorities can become more involved, potentially as co-sponsors. Universities and independent schools are also coming in as sponsors or co-sponsors, with the £2 million fee waived. In addition, CTCs and independent schools can convert to Academy status, and these schools will be quite different from most of the other schools in the programme.

It should be noted that many of the proposed Academies in development have a private sponsor. Just because a new type of Academy, using universities and successful schools as non-fee paying sponsors and co-sponsors has emerged, does not mean the original model has been totally abandoned. Despite having 45 universities publically on board so far, it

²¹⁹ Quoted in Meikle, J. 2007. 'More private schools consider state links', *The Guardian* August 4th. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/aug/04/schools.publicschools>. Accessed 11/11/2007.

²²⁰ Quoted in Meikle, 'More private schools consider private links'.

²²¹ Quoted in Stewart, W. 2008. 'Comprehensive to set up chain of academies', *Times Educational Supplement* December 12th, p. 3.

means that only a relatively small proportion of the projected 314 Academies will be of this new type.

5. Alternatives to Academies

This section considers some alternative routes to achieving the original objectives of the Academies programme, other than through Academies.

It was originally argued that the unique characteristics of Academies were necessary to fulfil the mission set for them by government. As outlined earlier, these are said to be independence, governance, sponsor, leadership model, buildings and specialism.²²² It would take an experimental research design to establish robustly that this were the case, ideally using a randomised control trial. However, a number of factors suggest that the underlying assumptions of the original policy should now be reassessed.

These factors include:

1. Not all Academies currently have these unique characteristics.
2. More types of school other than Academies show some of these characteristics.
3. Not all Academies have been successful, despite having these characteristics.;
4. Schools which are not Academies appear to be successful in similar circumstances, despite not having all these characteristics.

This is not to argue for the abandonment of existing successful Academies, though it perhaps suggests that some of the less successful ones might better be turned around by other approaches. What this allows is the opening up of the programme to alternative approaches that might be equally – or even more – appropriate, without the necessity of maintaining a dogmatic adherence to the key characteristics originally envisaged. The entry of former successful independent schools into the programme already constitutes a significant departure from the original model(s). This should free us to consider other creative alternatives, which, arguably, might address the original problems for which Academies were supposed to provide an answer (e.g. disadvantage and educational underachievement), and this to a greater extent than some of the existing approaches, such as the conversion of independent schools.

Many of the features of Academies can also be found outside the programme, including:

- **Specialism** – Specialist schools and CTCs have specialisms;
- **Sponsors** – Specialist schools and CTCs work with sponsors, and Trust Schools also engage with partners;
- **New builds** – All state secondary schools will qualify for funds under *Building Schools for the Future*;
- **Revitalising a failing school** – The Fresh Start initiative can provide a change in regime and in the *National Challenge* the DCSF encourages ‘failing’ schools to join federations or become a Trust school, as well as promoting the Academy option;
- **Working with other schools** – Federations and Extended schools both provide ways for schools to collaborate.

As noted earlier in this report, many of the core features of Academies, such as specialisms and sponsors, existed already in Specialist schools and CTCs. Trust schools, a more recent

²²² PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 4th Annual Report*, pp. 69-81.

initiative, also facilitate involvement with external partners, whether private business, universities, or other schools. What the above initiatives do not offer is the large degree of independence which is the critical distinguishing aspect of Academies. However, many of the distinctive aspects of Academies, such as external partners, specialism and a new management regime, can be achieved through other types of schools and initiatives. There are also other models of co-operation (which can include Academies) between schools, an original objective of the programme. Federations seek to encourage collaboration as opposed to competition amongst schools, and successful schools can assist under-achieving ones.²²³ Extended schools serve their locality and collaborate with local services.²²⁴

The rest of this section focuses on two alternatives to Academies. Firstly, Trust schools are examined. The second alternative, Professional Development Schools, are not currently established in the UK, but with the increasing involvement of universities with schools, may become a viable model for schools in England.

5.1. Trust Schools

True analysis of the benefits of the Academies programme now needs to take into account the emergence of Trust schools. There are currently 106 Trust schools, and another 378 schools are 'seeking to apply trust status'.²²⁵ Trust schools mean that there is another alternative to Academies if schools want to engage with outside partners. Trusts appear to be partly based on certain aspects of the Academy programme. In the 2005 White paper, the Department states that it wishes to 'enable every school to become a self-governing Trust school, with the benefit of external drive and new freedoms, mirroring the successful experience of Academies'.²²⁶ Trusts are defined in the following way in a 2007 prospectus:

Trust schools are state-funded foundation schools supported by a charitable trust. The purpose of the trust is to use partnership working as a vehicle to drive up standards through long-term, formal relationships between the partner organisations. They allow innovative ways of addressing persistent school-based challenges to be developed through the expertise of a range of partners, which can include universities, national and local businesses, as well as third sector and public sector organisations.²²⁷

Becoming a Trust offers all schools the opportunity to have links with external partners, who can help provide 'innovation'. While there are many different models of Academies, as demonstrated in this report, variations of Trusts are potentially even more multifarious:

There is no set model for a trust: the first examples, which opened in September 2007, range from a single secondary school with one partner, to a federation of secondary schools focusing on delivery of the 14-19 agenda, or a secondary school with its feeder primary schools and their local community resources, focusing on health issues, transition or the Every Child Matters agenda.²²⁸

²²³ Leaton Gray and Whitty, 'Comprehensive schooling and social inequality in London', pp. 112-3.

²²⁴ Leaton Gray and Whitty, 'Comprehensive schooling and social inequality in London', pp. 113-5.

²²⁵ Balls, E. 2008. Written Answer. Hansard October 13th, Column 848W.

²²⁶ DfES. *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*. p. 29.

²²⁷ DCSF & DIUS, *Academies, Trusts and Higher Education: prospectus*, p. 9.

²²⁸ DCSF & DIUS, *Academies, Trusts and Higher Education: prospectus*, p. 9.

Sir Bruce Liddington, the former Schools Commissioner, further outlines different types of Trust of schools:²²⁹

- one school with a Trust;
- one poorly performing school with a Trust;
- a number of local schools with a Trust;
- a number of national schools with a Trust.

Involvement in Trust schools can be seen as a less time-consuming and less controversial way of universities being involved with schools, in comparison to sponsoring an Academy. Roger Brown, former vice-chancellor of Southampton Solent University, is mindful of some of the issues surrounding Academies, and chose the Trust option when he headed the institution: 'Academies drive a nail into an integrated local school system because they become local independent schools funded by the state, just like direct grant schools of old [...] But with trust schools you get the benefits of schools and universities collaborating without the downside.'²³⁰

Tulloch believes that Trusts are a way of bringing in sponsors to schools that have remained fully in the state sector:

The current academy prospectus says: 'Independent status is crucial in enabling academies to succeed.' I do not understand why what is being called the educational DNA, which the sponsors are supposed to inject, cannot be brought into a school through its becoming a trust school and therefore remaining in the maintained sector.²³¹

This perhaps represents something of a shift in the position of the educational establishment, which initially seemed equally opposed to Trust schools. If so, it may offer a way of gaining some of the benefits of Academies without the same costs and controversies.

Even so, becoming a Trust school still involves a significant change of governance and it should be remembered that business and university partnerships are by no means restricted to Academies and Trusts, which still constitute a minority of state secondary schools in England.

5.2. Professional Development Schools

With universities being increasingly enticed to become involved with schools, especially as sponsors, co-sponsors or partners of Academies and Trusts, one model that could be followed is that of Professional Development Schools (PDSs). PDSs emerged in the US in the late 1980s. A PDS seeks to mix university academic expertise with practitioners in schools:

²²⁹ Liddington, B. 2006. 'Office of the Schools Commissioner', presentation slides. http://www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/UserFiles/CW/File/Policy/EMT/Sir_Bruce_Liddington_Pres_1206.ppt#435,16,Trust%20Schools. Accessed 12/04/2008.

²³⁰ Hodges, 'Conflict rule in Camden'.

²³¹ House of Commons, 'Diversity of schools: Academies', response to Q81.

...the PDS is an undertaking of schools and schools of education to create places in which entering teachers can combine theory and practice in a setting organized to support their learning; veteran teachers can renew their own professional development and assume new roles as mentors, university adjuncts, and teacher leaders; and school and university educators together can engage in research and rethinking of practice.²³²

Darling-Hammond believes that this collaboration is very beneficial: '[t]he resulting community of practice is powerful for all of the members, an engine for continual learning for students, student teachers, veteran teachers, and teacher educators, and a source of renewal.'²³³ Having a university as a sponsor of school could potentially enable this to happen. She emphasises the importance of collaboration:

One of the most striking features of current PDSs is their emphasis on collaboration – via shared decision making in teams within schools and between schools and universities, team teaching within both the schools and universities, and collaborative research among teachers, student teachers, and teacher educators...²³⁴

Yet PDSs are difficult to develop without 'fundamental change': '[i]n contrast to many other kinds of school-university collaboration that result in projects that do not tamper much with the core of either institution, the work of jointly restructuring schools and schools of education is doubly difficult.'²³⁵ So becoming a PDS would involve change on the part of the school of education at the university as well as the school.

Both the Academies and Trusts programmes offer a route to develop a Professional Development School in the UK. Yet, realistically, given the intensity of the commitment, it would only be possible to develop a relatively small number of PDSs.

Summary

There are various alternatives to Academies which can achieve some of the Academies' objectives. The progress of Trust schools may be inextricably linked with the Academies programme. It is conceivable, as both programmes push towards targets of around 400, that they might compete for sponsors or partners, of whom there could well be a limited supply. Trust schools, distinguishable because they have less independence than Academies, still have the ability to partner with outside bodies. They may be a more attractive option for some potential sponsors/partners because, at the current time, they do not attract the same level of controversy. In addition, with the rise of higher education involvement with schools, a more fully realised version of a Professional Development School might also be considered.

²³² Darling-Hammond, L. 2005. 'Introduction' in Darling-Hammond, L. (ed) *Professional Development Schools: Schools for Developing a Profession*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. vii-xii. p. vii.

²³³ Darling-Hammond, 'Introduction', pp. viii-ix.

²³⁴ Darling-Hammond, L. 2005. 'Developing Professional Development Schools: Early Lessons, Challenge, and Promise' in Darling-Hammond, L. (ed) *Professional Development Schools: Schools for Developing a Profession*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 1-27. p. 9.

²³⁵ Darling-Hammond, 'Developing Professional Development Schools', p. 21.

6. Conclusion

This report has looked at different aspects of the Academies programme. It has found that there is not a consistent level of performance or pupil composition across Academies. A number of different models of Academies are currently emerging. There are also alternatives to Academies, some already operating in England such as Trust schools, and others which have been established overseas such as Professional Development Schools. This concluding section will summarise what we have learned from the evaluations of Academies, and will consider whether the programme is meeting its original objectives. Finally, possible futures for the programme will be outlined.

6.1. Evaluations of Academies

As we have seen, there have been various evaluations of the Academies programme. Obviously, it will take time to assess the true impact of the policy, and whether these schools have improved performance while still catering to areas of disadvantage. There is also the issue of isolating unique ‘Academy effects’ as opposed to the benefits of schools having new buildings and management. Nevertheless, most evaluations have been broadly positive, with some caveats.

Ofsted have, to date, inspected a total of 29 Academies. Six have been deemed as ‘outstanding’, 10 as ‘good’, and 13 as ‘satisfactory’. One Academy (Unity City) had been put into special measures in 2005 but passed a subsequent inspection in 2007.²³⁶ Ofsted’s 2005/06 annual report (nine Academies were inspected that year) states:

Given the histories of most of their predecessor schools and their legacy of low achievement, considerable progress has been made in improving morale, pupils’ behaviour and the learning ethos. The quality of leadership is a strength in most academies, but the impact of management on the quality of the teaching has been more limited. There remain difficulties with staff recruitment and, in some academies, retention. The most common issue is the inexperience of many staff.²³⁷

Whether this means the programme can be considered a success comes down to how Academies are to be benchmarked. That 13 of the inspected Academies were considered ‘satisfactory’ might not necessarily appear to be a ringing endorsement, especially when Ofsted has been arguing more generally that ‘satisfactory’ is no longer adequate.²³⁸

The fourth PwC evaluation (2007), while generally positive about the programme, draws attention to the variation between Academies and the dangers of just examining the aggregated data on Academies:

²³⁶ Information collated from the Ofsted website:

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/postcode_search?type=8192%7CSecondary+schools%7Cedu®ister=&postcode=&radius=8047 Accessed 01/12/2008.

²³⁷ Ofsted, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools 2005/06*, p. 18 (32).

²³⁸ Christine Gilbert interviewed in Wilby, P. 2007. ‘Raising the bar’, *Education Guardian* November 27, pp. 1-2.

...whilst at an aggregate level the patterns of pupil performance are favourable, some individual Academies have genuinely struggled, and have experienced a significant deterioration in performance. The flip-side of this is that other Academies have managed to improve performance at a much greater rate, even than the relatively high average improvement across all Academies. This is an important point because it means that the process of averaging across all Academies has limitations both from a policy and a methodological point of view, and thus any averages across all Academies need to be interpreted within the context of significant diversity that exists between individual Academies.²³⁹

However, the final PwC report did not make a conclusion about the wider benefits of Academies: '[t]he evaluation suggests that there is insufficient evidence to make a definitive judgement about the Academies as a model for school improvement.'²⁴⁰

The NAO evaluation was also broadly supportive of the programme, although it expressed some concerns, such as that lessons learned from early Academies were not being adequately disseminated.²⁴¹ The PAC concurs with the latter point and also questions whether Academies always provide the best value for money option.²⁴² The various reports from trade unions expressed concerns about many aspects of the programme.

6.2. How Academies have performed against their original objectives

This section will consider how Academies have performed against the three ultimate objectives set for the programme in the PwC evaluation's terms of reference.

Objective 1: Academies will contribute to driving up standards by raising achievement levels for their own pupils, their family of schools and the wider community by breaking the cycle of underachievement and low aspirations in areas of deprivation with historical low performance.

While attainment is improving in Academies as a whole, this is not true of all Academies. The government has set the *National Challenge* benchmark of schools having at least 30% of their pupils achieving five GCSEs at A*-C (including English and Maths) by 2011, in order not to be considered as 'underachieving'. So far, the majority of Academies are not managing to reach this target. This is of particular concern for the Phase 1 and 2 Academies (with results available), which had been open for at least four years at the time of the 2007 GCSE results. Only one of the nine Phase 1 and 2 schools has reached the target. Yet, many of these schools have been improving from a low base, often above the national average. Even so, in 2007, only four out of these nine Academies had improved on their previous year's results. One of the original intermediate objectives was for Academies to reach the national average for attainment within four years, although this timescale, considering the history of the predecessor schools, was always unrealistic.

²³⁹ PwC, *Academies Evaluation – 4th Annual Report*, p. 83.

²⁴⁰ PwC, *Academies Evaluation Fifth Annual Report*, p. 219.

²⁴¹ See conclusion d: NAO, *The Academies Programme*, p. 23.

²⁴² See conclusions numbers 9 and 11 in PAC, 'The Academies Programme', p.6.

Another part of the first ultimate objective is that Academies should boost the performance of neighbouring schools. Yet there has been concern from some about possible adverse effects on neighbouring schools, for example in relation to admissions and exclusions. There is so far little evidence on the impact Academies have had in this respect. It should also be noted co-operation between Academies and local schools had been hindered until 2007 by VAT regulations (since rescinded) which prevented schools from sharing facilities.

Objective 2: Academies will be part of local strategies to increase choice and diversity in education. They will have innovative approaches to one or more of governance, curriculum, staffing structures and pay, teaching and learning, structure of the school day and year, using ICT.

Elements of this objective have caused unease, and continue to do so, especially amongst teaching unions. Particularly problematic is the fact that Academies do not have to sign up to national pay and conditions. Aspects of innovation have, to some extent, been reined in with changes in policy. For example, Academies are now required to follow core subjects in the National Curriculum. While various evaluations praise the management in Academies, it will be important to distinguish which innovations unique to Academies have been particularly effective.

Objective 3: Academies will be inclusive, mixed ability school[s].

This objective also continues to draw some attention. Academies are, on the whole, very diverse schools but the social mix in some Academies appears to be changing. In some cases, this has seen the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM fall while actual numbers have increased. It may be difficult to sustain the high levels of pupils eligible for FSM in all Academies, especially if, as NFER research on 17 early Academies suggests, they are over represented on this measure compared to the FSM rate of their local area. Indeed, it may not even be desirable. But, in order for the programme to meet Objective 1, the schools will have to maintain a *relatively* high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to be representative of the schools' local area and the decrease in the percentage of FSM pupils in Academies by 16.3 percentage points must at least put a question mark over the compatibility of objectives 1 and 3.

6.3. The future of the Academies programme

Eight years after the programme was first announced, there have been a number of policy developments with relevance for the Academies Programme. The TUC report concludes that the changing policy landscape makes a rethink necessary:

...the report concludes that there is no longer enough clarity about the Government's overall strategy for improving secondary provision, especially the basis on which the Academies programme sits alongside other existing initiatives, and that this should be rectified as a matter of some urgency.²⁴³

²⁴³ Rogers and Migniuolo, *A New Direction*, p. 5.

Ball's assertion that the Academies programme is a condensate of New Labour policy may be particularly apt when considering how the policy has developed during the transition between the Blair and Brown governments. The emphasis on closing the achievement gap in the new Public Service Agreement targets perhaps explains why a policy, which had been expected to be sidelined, remains at the heart of the agenda. Ed Balls told the Commons in July 2007 '[i]t is my belief that [...] we should accelerate the pace of the academies programme over the next few years, with a much greater role for universities.'²⁴⁴ The current use of the programme to get universities more involved with schools, and the potential conversion of a number of independent schools, means that the Academies programme is being employed as a means to engage with key stakeholders as part of the new government's priorities.

The Academies programme is extremely ambitious, as the objectives above illustrate. It seeks to 'turn around' underachieving schools and boost the performance of neighbouring schools using innovative methods. This has not proven easy to achieve in the first few years of the programme.

There are many lessons that can be learned from existing Academies. The current literature and our own exploration of the programme so far, indicate that the following criteria might be applied for any proposed Academy:

- That the Academy is wanted in the locality, and initial plans proceed only if there is local support for the project during extensive and open consultation.
- That the school does not adopt religious doctrines, such as creationism, in its curriculum;
- That a sponsor from the private sector should not have any business interest which is not compatible with the ethos of a school.
- That it is non-selective and part of a non-selective local system.
- That the specialism does not replicate provision in the area, and is something that could not easily be supplied by another sponsor.
- That it has durable relationships with neighbouring schools;
- That the school's governing body has extensive staff and parent representation, and that this requirement would be irreversible.
- That trade unions are recognised.

The emerging models of Academies might provide a more fruitful direction for the programme. If a key concern of critics of Academies is the motivations of commercial or religious sponsors, this is surely an argument for this greater engagement by the higher education sector as 'sponsors'. There are perhaps three aspects to university sponsorship which need to be considered. One is their contribution, as relatively successful businesses in their own right, to the management and governance of a school. Schools of business and management may have particular expertise to offer in this respect. Another is the contribution that academic departments might make to the development of the curriculum in a school and to the raising of aspirations on the part of the pupils of the school, through university staff and student involvement in the school and school teacher and pupil involvement in the university. The third is the contribution that a university school of education might make to the establishment and ongoing operation of a school, with

²⁴⁴ Hansard, House of Commons debates July 10th, Column 1322.

particular reference to pedagogical innovation and the professional development of staff. Ideally, all these forms of involvement would be desirable, though as not all universities have schools of education some may have difficulty in offering the third type of involvement.

The question remains, though, whether some of the benefits that university sponsorship of Academies bring to the system might also be achieved by other means. It is clear, for instance, from Margaret Tulloch's comments to the Children, Schools and Families Committee, that Trust schools are no longer as contentious with the educational establishment as are Academies. They provide another route to introduce universities' DNA and, although there is anxiety about Trust schools being their own admission authorities, these concerns apply equally to existing Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools. While the greater acceptability of Trust schools to the educational establishment might be a negative point with some Academy advocates and sponsors, for universities it would more likely play as a positive one. This may be particularly the case for university schools of education, whose activities depend in large part on the ongoing goodwill of local schools, local authorities and teachers' organisations.

7. Policy Implications

An early draft of this report was discussed with various stakeholders in the Academies programme at a Roundtable event in October. Some of that discussion has informed the following policy implications.

- The controversies surrounding Academies may limit their effectiveness in producing system-wide improvement. **If Academies are to remain an important part of the educational landscape for the foreseeable future, their role in the overall system needs to be clarified.**
- **The government should revisit and refine the objectives of the Academies programme.** Different priorities point to the need for different models of schools. It may be, for example, that existing approaches are ill-suited to improving the performance of neighbouring schools.
- **Academies are likely to have more influence if they co-operate with neighbouring schools** in terms of admissions, exclusions and sharing their resources. The increased collaboration already required in ‘behaviour partnerships’ and the provision of 14-19 diplomas could usefully be extended.
- **Academies’ admissions practices, along with those of all state schools, should be more closely monitored,** especially in terms of the impact they might have on the intakes of their neighbouring schools.
- While banding of admissions has enabled some Academies to become more inclusive, **area-wide banding would ensure that this was not to the detriment of other local schools.**
- In founding Academies, more consultation is needed on **the demand and appropriateness of a particular specialism in the locality,** especially in relation to the provision already available.
- It should be standard practice to have **staff and parent representation on Academies’ governing bodies,** and observance of this should be regularly monitored.
- **The emergence of Academy chains is a potentially important and valuable development.** However, care needs to be taken to ensure that the benefits of school autonomy are not lost by key decisions being taken away from individual schools by the central management.
- Some Academies have used their autonomy to innovate in terms of school leadership, staffing, curriculum and pedagogy. **Their role in sharing good practice could be enhanced by following the model of Professional Development Schools.**

- **The involvement of universities and successful schools as sponsors and co-sponsors** is an important development. It would be advantageous to **extend this type of partnership to other state schools, especially those with traditionally low rates of higher education participation.**
- Academies are in danger of being regarded by politicians as a panacea for a broad range of education problems. Given the variable performance of Academies to date, conversion to an Academy may not always be the best route to improvement. **Care needs to be taken to ensure that Academies are the ‘best fit’ solution to the problem at hand.**
- **There should be more sophisticated use of pupil level data in evaluating the success of Academies.**
- **Comparisons between Academies, and between Academies and other schools, should take more account of differences in,** for example:
 - admissions policies;
 - pupil demographics;
 - performance of the predecessor school;
 - behavioural issues;
 - stability or otherwise of staffing;
 - changes in school leadership.

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Appendix

Universities as sponsors/partners of academies:

1. University of Bedfordshire – Northfields
2. Birmingham City University (formerly UCE) – Eastside Academy
3. University of Birmingham – Harborne Academy
4. Aston University – St Alban’s Academy
5. University of Bolton – new school name to be confirmed
6. Bournemouth University – new school name tbc
7. University of Bradford – The Rhodesway Academy
8. Brunel University – Stockley Academy and Harefield Academy
9. University of Brighton – new school name tbc
10. University of the West of England – new school name tbc and The City Academy Bristol
11. University of Bristol – Merchants’ Academy Worthywood
12. University of Huddersfield – Holy Trinity
13. University College London (UCL) – new school
14. University of Chester – South Area Academy
15. University of Warwick – Grace Academy Coventry
16. Coventry University – Swansell Academy
17. University of Central Lancashire – Westlakes Academy
18. University of Cumbria – new school name tbc
19. Sheffield Hallam University – Shirebrook Academy
20. University of Gloucestershire – new school name tbc
21. Queen Mary, University of London – St Paul’s Academy
22. University of Plymouth – Hereford Steiner Academy
23. University of Hertfordshire – new school name tbc
24. City University London – City of London Academy
25. University of Greenwich, London – Marlowe Academy , Folkestone Academy
26. University of Kent – Longfield Academy
27. Canterbury Christ Church University – Marlowe Academy, Folkestone Academy
28. Imperial College London – The Chelsea Science Academy
29. York St John University - Archbishop Sentamu Academy
30. University of Hull – Archbishop Sentamu Academy
31. University of Lincoln – the Priory LSST Academy, The Priory Witham Academy, The Priory City of Lincoln Academy.
32. University of Liverpool – North Liverpool Academy
33. Liverpool Hope University – Academy of St Francis Assisi
34. Edge Hill University – new school name tbc
35. University College for the Creative Arts (UCCA)
36. University of Northampton – new school name tbc
37. University Of Nottingham – Nottingham University Samworth Academy
38. Oxford Brookes University – The Oxford Academy
39. University of Wolverhampton – Q3 Academy
40. University of Bath – new school name tbc
41. Kings College London – St Michael’s and All Angels C of E Academy
42. University of Sunderland – Red House Academy
43. University of Westminster – Westminster Academy
44. University of Chichester – new school name tbc
45. Durham University – new school name tbc

Source: DCSF **Press Notice 2008/0193**