



## **Track Record, Capability and Capacity**

Completing Section E1 and 2 of the  
application form for mainstream, special and  
alternative provision applicants

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## 1. Track record

### 1.1 For existing academy trusts

This section provides an opportunity to:

- Demonstrate the strengths of your trust and other individuals
- Pre-empt any challenges or questions the Department for Education (DfE) may have regarding your track record

#### Demonstrating your strengths

The Department for Education will have access to your published outcomes data, so use this section to provide additional internal metrics as well as describing how you have achieved your aims as a trust. This also applies to mainstream schools that will be converting and establishing a new trust.

Consider discussing:

- Any sponsored schools in which outcomes and/or standards have improved through the intervention of the trust. Include a narrative around how this has been achieved.
- Strong outcomes for disadvantaged pupils compared to national averages, demonstrating a reduced attainment gap
- Highlighting specific praise from Ofsted reports on elements that are important to your trust
- The role of high performing schools in sharing best practice within the trust and the wider education community (e.g., informal arrangements to support struggling schools, providing CPD, status as teaching school hubs)
- Outcomes from peer/other external reviews
- Parent and pupil voice surveys
- Key achievements from core team members such as awards, NLE status etc.

#### Addressing concerns:

This is an opportunity to provide additional context around any underperforming schools in the trust.

Consider:

- Sponsored schools that have not been graded: highlight any incremental improvements, even if this has been determined from internal reviews/data. Discuss your trust's approach to school improvement more generally and explain what the continuing priorities are the school, and how you will address these.

- Free schools that have not yet been inspected: As above, internal data and reviews can be used to give a picture of the school's early successes. You can also refer to other metrics such as pupil recruitment levels and parental feedback.
- Schools that are underperforming and/or have been downgraded or consistently graded RI: This section is not about making excuses, but you may wish to provide additional context – for example, demonstrating that your outcomes still exceed those of other schools in the area even if they are lower than national averages. You may feel that an Ofsted downgrading was not representative; in this case, pick out positive aspects of the report and other sources of information to highlight the relative strengths of the school. The key here is to demonstrate that you have a robust school improvement plan in place and to outline where this is already starting to take effect.

## 1.2 For new providers

As a new provider, you will not have an organisational track record, and are not required to complete this section. However, you may still want to use this section to provide more detail about the track record of individuals within your proposer team. For instance, you should have at least one member of the team with experience of leading a Good or Outstanding state school and can use this section to discuss their key achievements. This will not be scored but can be a way to show the DfE that you are aware of the commitments and challenges this proposal will bring.

## 2. Capacity and capability

**Capacity** refers to the time and resources you are able to dedicate to the application and pre-opening phase of the free school.

**Capability** refers to the knowledge, skills and experience of the team who will be leading and supporting the free school project.

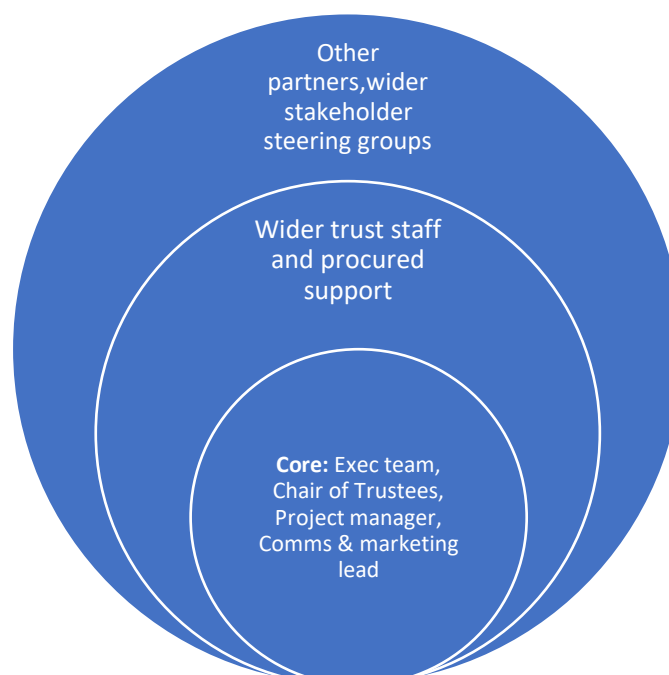
### 2.1 Completing the table (all applicants)

You must complete the table in this section. It will take some time to gather this information, so it is worth looking at this section early on to ensure you have the information on each team member.

#### Core team

When considering your core team, you should consider which individuals will likely be part of the project through from the application to the school being set up.

For an existing trust, the structure of your team might look like this.



For new providers, consider who will be committing the most time to the project, and whose expertise is essential to the project. The core team should include at least:

- An education lead with experience of senior leadership and a good track record in the phase and type of school you are proposing
- A finance lead with appropriate understanding of state school (preferably academy) finances, and with suitable accountancy qualifications
- Individuals who will make strong trustees, ideally including an individual with a strong understanding of academy governance such as an experienced trustee.
- Additional expertise in SEN or nursery provision where necessary

### Time commitments

As a rule of thumb, in the pre-opening period the core team will be required to contribute on average a **full working week** (35 hours a week) between them. This will not be the case for all periods of pre-opening but can be used as a guide for how many hours each individual should be able to commit to.

## 2.2 Skills gap analysis

You will be expected to outline where your skills gaps are. Consider all the tasks of pre-opening (see the DfE guidance here), and whether you have people within your team who are able to provide support with this. Typical areas of expertise that applicants might lack include:

- Project management
- Communications and marketing
- Site, buildings and capital projects

There is no issue if you choose to procure external expertise in these areas using your project development grant. However, you should be clear that you will follow due process when procuring services using public money (even if you have a provider in mind, you should explain that you will follow best practice in procuring competitive quotes)!

You should also consider any specific vacancies on the trust board (consider particularly if you have any SEN experience if applying for a SEN unit) and local governors that you will need to recruit.

## 2.3 Additional narrative

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In addition to the tables, you should use this section to:

- Demonstrate your understanding of the pre-opening process by discussing how you will manage the project internally. This will likely involve the use of project working groups led by a project manager (procured or internal). You could also use this section to show your understanding of the risks of pre-opening with your mitigation strategies.
- *For existing providers:* Explain how you will build capacity into your model by backfilling existing roles in the trust e.g., if an existing headteacher in the trust is leading on the development of policies for the school, how will their day-to-day duties be fulfilled?
- *For new providers:* Explain how the application group will transition into the project steering group and beyond if the school is approved. Note that the free school process should not be used to guarantee members of the team roles within the free school.
- Explain the role of any partners or additional expertise beyond the core team and how they have assured their commitment to the project into pre-opening and once the school is open.

## 2.4 Recruiting your principal designate (E2b)

Recruiting the Principal Designate (PD, i.e., the person you will appoint as headteacher/principal of the new school) is a key task of pre-opening.

Usually, PDs will be in post around two terms before the school opens (Jan-March if the school opens in September). Recruitment costs and their salary in this time are usually funded from the Project Development Grant that is received in pre-opening.

When recruiting, you should consider what this process will look like – how many rounds of interviews will you conduct? Will a task be involved? Who will be involved in the recruitment process?

When outlining your timescales, consider leaving enough time to go back for a second round of recruitment in case you struggle to find the right applicant the first-time round.

*For trusts with a PD in mind:* if you are an existing trust, you may have an existing staff member in mind for the role of PD, such as a current headteacher looking for a new role, or a Deputy Head who is ready for additional responsibility. Likewise, you may wish to have an existing head or executive headteacher oversee the new school as an Executive Headteacher in its initial years. If you have someone in mind for the role, you should lay out their skills and experience that make them a strong fit, and also provide some narrative around how you will backfill their role.

*For new providers:* If you are not an existing trust, you may likewise decide for one of the members of your core group, such as the education lead, to take on the role of headteacher for the new school.

It is important that you demonstrate an awareness of any potential conflicts of interest here, (e.g., by having the PD set their own salary). The Department for Education will want to see that you have chosen the best candidate for the role, so you may wish to consider running an open recruitment process through which your nominated team member can apply. This will ensure transparency and that you have the most appropriately qualified person in post.

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<sup>i</sup> Premier Advisory Group, which powers Create: Schools, and its partners may be able to provide support in pre-opening. [Get in touch](#) to find out more.