



The Multi Academy Trust  
Strategic Briefing Series:

# Briefing No. 1



# Procurement Consolidation and System Collaboration: Strategic Reflections for Multi-Academy Trust Boards

Multi-academy trusts are operating in an increasingly constrained environment, shaped by sustained financial pressure, rising safeguarding expectations, workforce constraints, and growing digital and cyber risk. At the same time, the education system continues to move towards greater scale, collaboration and central oversight.

In this context, procurement decisions are no longer purely operational. They are increasingly strategic choices that shape risk, accountability and resilience across the trust and, in some cases, beyond it.

This paper explores the emerging case for procurement consolidation and collaboration across MATs and schools, with particular focus on services that underpin safeguarding, security, digital infrastructure and system assurance. It is intended as a thought leadership piece for Trustees and executive leaders, supporting strategic reflection rather than prescribing a single course of action.



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## The direction of travel

Across the school system, there is a clear shift towards more collaborative operating models. Trusts are increasingly being encouraged to work together where this improves value for money, reduces duplication and strengthens resilience.

Within this context, the maturity of a trust is no longer judged solely by its internal performance, but also by how effectively it can operate within a wider system.

Procurement frameworks and shared services have become an important part of this conversation. For many MATs, they offer a practical route to collaboration without compromising accountability or control. This is not about standardisation for its own sake. It is about creating more consistent standards and assurance in areas such as safeguarding and security, where variation can introduce risk.

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## Procurement as a strategic lever

Procurement has traditionally been treated as a technical or financial function. However, as trusts grow in scale and complexity, it becomes clear that fragmented procurement arrangements can create structural weaknesses.

Multiple suppliers, overlapping contracts and inconsistent service standards can obscure accountability, complicate oversight and absorb disproportionate leadership capacity.

Consolidated procurement models offer a different proposition. By reducing fragmentation, they can make it easier for boards and executive leaders to understand where responsibility sits, how risks are managed, and whether services are delivering what the trust requires.

While financial efficiencies are often part of the rationale, the more significant benefits are frequently found in improved assurance, clearer governance and reduced operational risk.

From a regulatory and financial stewardship perspective, this aligns closely with expectations around value for money, transparency and robust oversight. From a DfE perspective, it also supports wider system priorities around sustainability, resilience, compliance and effective trust leadership.



Find out more. Call or email:

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## Safeguarding-critical infrastructure

**Not all services lend themselves equally to consolidation. Across the sector, the strongest strategic case often exists where services are both infrastructure-based and safeguarding-critical.**

Digital connectivity, broadband provision, integrated filtering and monitoring, and cyber security fall firmly into this category.

These services underpin day-to-day safeguarding practice and carry significant risk if they are poorly specified or inconsistently configured. Variation in filtering thresholds, monitoring capability or network resilience can expose pupils and staff to harm, while also limiting the board's ability to gain clear assurance over compliance.

By contrast, more centralised approaches can make it easier to establish clear standards, monitor performance and respond quickly when issues arise.

At a strategic level, this reframes digital infrastructure as a safeguarding control rather than a technical convenience. For Trustees, the key question is not simply whether individual schools are satisfied with their arrangements, but whether the trust can evidence consistent and effective safeguarding assurance across its operating footprint.

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## Collaboration beyond the trust

**As MATs strengthen their internal operating models, some are beginning to consider whether the principles of consolidation and shared infrastructure could extend beyond their own trust boundaries.**

In some areas, particularly where schools are already working together informally, there is growing interest in whether shared services might support wider groups of schools, including those outside a MAT.

As an emerging strategic consideration, this has the potential to increase buying power, improve consistency of safeguarding standards, and strengthen resilience at local and regional level. It also aligns with the government's vision for strong trusts contributing beyond their own schools.

For most boards, the main driver remains practical rather than structural: greater resilience, greater consistency and stronger assurance.

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## Governance and board oversight

For Trustees, procurement consolidation and collaboration raise important governance questions. As operating models become more centralised or collaborative, boards must be confident that accountability remains clear, controls remain robust, and oversight is not diluted.

This includes clarity over who owns contracts, how performance is monitored, and how key

risks, particularly safeguarding and cyber risks, are identified, managed and evidenced.

Strong governance in this area is characterised by transparency, clear reporting and disciplined decision-making. Consolidation should simplify oversight, not obscure it.

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## Strategic reflection

This paper does not seek approval for any specific course of action. Instead, it invites Trustees to reflect on how procurement, safeguarding and digital infrastructure increasingly intersect, and how collaborative approaches might support more resilient, sustainable and accountable operating models.

The strategic challenge for MAT boards is not whether collaboration is desirable. That direction of travel is becoming increasingly clear. The more important question is how collaboration can be structured in a way that strengthens safeguarding and security, improves oversight and protects public funds.

Approached thoughtfully, procurement consolidation can become more than an efficiency measure. It can become a defining feature of mature, system-focused trust leadership.

Many MAT boards and executive teams are already considering how to strengthen safeguarding and cyber assurance at scale, balance autonomy with consistency, and ensure procurement decisions support long-term resilience.



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# Continue the conversation

If you'd like to discuss how this could work in practice for your Trust, we will be happy to arrange a short, initial conversation.

We can support strategic thinking and share insight into how cloud-based, assurance-led digital safeguarding & security services, delivered without the need for local infrastructure or capital investment, can help underpin emerging consolidation and collaboration models.

Otherwise, this paper should give some of what you need to brief your team and your board.



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