



## **DCSF Announces Consultation on Accreditation of Academy Sponsors, School Providers and School Groups**

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced on 21 October 2009 a consultation for a new accreditation process for Academy Sponsors, School Providers and School Groups. The accreditation process seeks to ensure improved standards in schools which are currently low attaining or otherwise underperforming. The proposals also set out a process for selecting sponsors to future Academy projects.

The DCSF will be holding a number of events at which stakeholders can express their views, which will be fed into the consultation. The response date for the consultation is the 22 January 2010. The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published on their e-consultation website by the end of March 2010.

### **Accredited School Providers and Accredited School Groups**

Under the proposals, there will be two categories of accreditation, Accredited School Providers (ASP's) and Accredited Schools Groups (ASG's). ASP's will be educational institutions, or other organisations applying with an educational institution, that wish to run one or two schools. All lead sponsors of Academies and lead partners of Majority Trusts and Federations will be required to seek and obtain accreditation as an ASP before they can be selected for a project. Academy sponsors who are not educational organisations will need to apply with an educational co-sponsor or partner to gain accreditation.

The ASG accreditation will be for those providers who wish to run three or more schools. Any organisations which already partner two or more schools or sponsor two or more Academies will be required to be accredited before they can be selected for further projects. It is anticipated that LA's will apply the same principles when selecting Majority Trusts and Federations where these provide support and improvement in underperforming schools. The DCSF has stated that it does not expect Academy sponsors or National Challenge Trust and Federation lead partners to be accredited for projects on which they are already acting.

### **Gaining Accreditation**

Organisations who wish to be accredited will be asked to submit a proposal which should include evidence to demonstrate that they possess the relevant expertise, track record and capacity to support improvement in underperforming schools. Providers will be asked to demonstrate:

- Sound governance;
- Effective leadership and management;
- Provide a strong model for managing and improving schools;
- Keep a track record of improving outcomes for children and young people; and
- Present a capacity to achieve transformational change in the schools they are supporting.

The DCSF will assess all applications against a published criterion and (where essential) visit the organisation to gain a better understanding of their proposal. Applications for ASG accreditation will be reviewed by a committee which will then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for a final decision.

## Academies

The DCSF will continue to work with LA's to identify underperforming schools that would benefit from becoming an Academy. For each new Academy proposal, the DCSF will invite declarations of interest from all ASP's and ASG's who have expressed an interest in sponsoring Academies in the region. In some cases, the DCSF will also advertise locally to encourage organisations with local ties to apply. If any organisations wish to declare an interest in sponsoring an Academy but are not accredited, they must first submit an application for accreditation to assess the organisation's suitability to act as a lead sponsor. Where an ASP or an ASG, proposes to act on an Academy project with a co-sponsor organisation, if the co-sponsor is not accredited, the consortium's declaration of interest must contain a short application by the non-accredited organisation to illustrate their suitability. Further due diligence checks will also be carried out on the co-sponsor to determine their suitability.

In cases where there are too many organisations declaring an interest, the DCSF and LA will shortlist up to four providers who will be invited for a brief discussion and presentation with a LA and DCSF panel on how they would establish and sustain high performance at the Academy and implement their proposals effectively.

## De-Accreditation

The consultation paper states that the accreditation of an organisation is likely to be removed if the organisation no longer meets the criteria for accreditation. The reasons for de-accreditation include;

- The performance of the ASP falls, to the extent that it would not meet the criteria for accreditation if it sought it;
- There is no improvement in the performance of the school being supported by an ASG over an agreed period;
- The performance of the school being supported by an ASP is adversely affected by their involvement (as shown by a range of evidence); or
- The organisation, or those who govern or manage the organisation, has been found to have acted illegally.

If the first 3 reasons apply, a warning letter will be issued to the ASP to express concern about the situation and to define a period in which the issues are to be rectified. A failure to comply with the conditions set out in the warning letter will result in an organisation's accreditation being removed and a complete prohibition from taking on further projects. Any organisation found to be acting illegally will have its accreditation removed and the LA/DCSF will take emergency action and intervene in the school being supported.

## Primary Schools

The consultation notes that primary schools would also be able to benefit from the support of ASPs and ASGs. The consultation does not go so far as to propose the introduction of Primary Academies though, stating that stand-alone primary Academies are not a proportionate or cost effective response to primary school underperformance.

## Conclusion

The Academy sponsor selection process has been criticised in the past for lacking transparency. The Government hopes that the proposals will reduce the overall burden for Academy Sponsors by making the selection process more uniform and transparent.

It is debatable though whether the proposals will be far reaching enough to satisfy those Academy opponents who advocate public consultations on Sponsor selection.

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