

ALBANY LEARNING TRUST
- DEVELOPING WORLD CLASS SCHOOLS

TRUST GROWTH



MARCH 2021

Albany Learning Trust

- Developing World Class Schools

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During lockdown we have become used to meeting online, in particular on Zoom. Along with being stuck on mute, leaving a hand up too long, many of us have been caught out by the 40 minute cut off of a free Zoom meeting. That first free 40 minutes has been designed into Zoom because it is focussed on ease of use and accessibility.

Zoom was founded in 2011, by a CEO who was frustrated with the user experience of current video conferencing. In 8 years, in part thanks to that free 40 minutes, Zoom moved from a startup in a crowded market, to a \$16 billion company which is the market leader.

The reason for its growth was that the company focussed on the user experience. In other words it was product led, not growth led.

PRODUCT LED, NOT GROWTH LAD

Albany Learning Trust is also product led, not growth led. Importantly we recognise that we may need to grow in order to improve what we do; we do not improve what we do in order to grow.

The narrative around academy trusts is often one of trusts growing, with 'MATs', (multi-academy trusts) 'take overs' and now 'mergers' being common terms. There are many stories of early trusts growing for growth's sake and more recently facing the previously unconsidered consequences of that growth.

This report sets out the context of academy trust growth from over the past 10 years and *our* thinking about why we should grow and a the possible steps for growth.

CONTEXT

GROWTH FOR ECONOMY

In 2017, Lord Agnew, the minister responsible for academies, said that small trusts should merge together in order to achieve financial viability, arguing that:

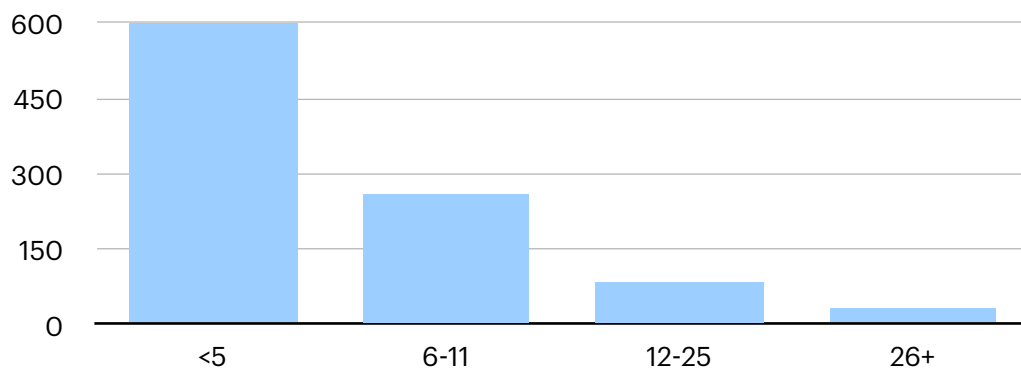
‘the sweet spot is perhaps somewhere between 12 and 20 schools, or something like 5,000 to 10,000 pupils’.

Economic Academies Benchmark Report 2016 surveyed more than 500 schools, and found that, on average, trusts were able to help primary schools realise savings in the order of £145 per pupil.

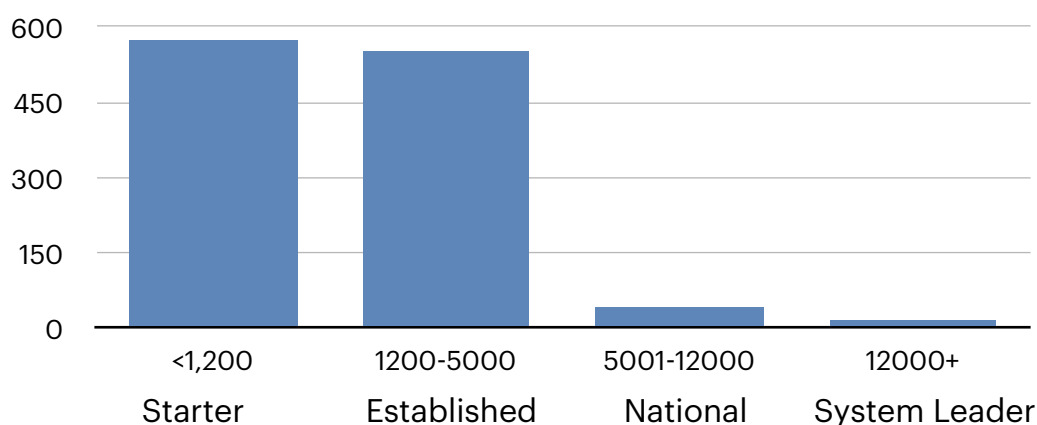
Regional clustering of academies within Trusts present significant opportunities for trusts to make savings through the greater use of regional tendering. The number of schools in a Trust does not, in of itself, bring costs down, but when a ‘cluster’ reaches a ‘critical mass’ of around half a dozen schools, efficiency savings

‘We grow to improve what we do; we don’t improve in order to grow’.

Academy Trusts by number of schools - 2019



Academy Trusts by number of Children - 2017



become noticeable.

Such clustering of academies also allows schools to coordinate services between them, such as catering, with one school preparing meals for fellow academies nearby.

A continuous process of standardising throughout trusts, through coordinating HR and finance functions into one office, or providing shared templates for contracts or teaching materials, can also help reduce costs.

Greater use of technology can also help trusts to standardise certain materials through the use of intranet services and cloud computing, for instance.

Using technology such as video conferencing can also help overcome geographic barriers to bring costs down, as well as save time.

GROWTH FOR IMPROVEMENT

In 2016, Sir David Carter, the National Schools Commissioner, argued that: 'we need our existing MATs to grow' in order 'to be sustainable'.

- Effective actions a trust can take as they grow include;
- standardisation of back-office functions provided by the trust.
- develop and standardised policies at trust level.
- develop subject curriculums.
- ensure that collaboration within the trust is used effectively



- work on behalf of its academies with other trusts, LAs and other schools in their local area.
- participate in local coordinating mechanisms around statutory duties such as safeguarding and SEND provision.
- ensure their accountability procedures encourage educationally-focused conversations about what children are learning.

WHY GROW

GROWTH FOR PURPOSE

Albany Learning Trust is 'product led, not growth led'. We do recognise that growth can improve our offer for children and our performance.

As a brave organisation, we are driven by our own long term goals to develop world class schools.

Our growth should be driven by the aims to enhance school improvement and to improve what we can offer our schools.

Education

Growth would increase our capacity to deliver our strategy for improvement across the trust and with schools beyond the trust, including:

- More opportunities for students to participate in a wider range of trust activities
- More chances for children to fulfil their complete school education in the trust
- A wider range of Teacher Learning Communities
- More coaching capacity
- More expert Mentors
- All through view by all teaching staff
- Lead for our own Trust early career framework
- Bring in: All interventions; supernumerary literacy & numeracy teachers
- More Trust SLEs who know our expectations and systems
- Trust-led subject networks
- Extra leadership capacity
- Secondments to enrich people's awareness of roles

**'We are driven by
our goal to develop
world class
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and professional development

- Teachers collaborating
- Subject leaders working together
- Retention of expertise - If one expert leaves, we retain some of their knowledge in the team
- Growth would enable greater urgency to support schools. High quality school improvement costs money. Greater income would mean that the school improvement strategy could be delivered by the Trust.

We are fully committed to an ‘all through’ approach to education. Therefore there should be an even number of primary and secondary schools.

People

A key lever of school improvement is collaboration. We are committed to every member of staff being part of a team to offer support and development. Being able to work with other experts in your field is a vital element of working in a trust.

Our growth should lead to:

- Every team in a school having at least one team in another school fulfilling the same role (eg two secondary English teams)
- Every member of staff in a school, having at least one expert ‘buddy’ within the trust who has the same responsibility
- The expansion of the number of key roles, bringing expertise into the trust
- Secondment opportunities across the trust
- Greater retention of talented staff by providing a full career pathway within the trust
- Greater investment in our staff - internal qualified trainers (eg coaches; HPL mentors); internal recognised training (eg trust offer of NPQs)
- Career spanning opportunities within the trust being available.

Finance

Growth should secure financial stability by;

- Attracting, training and retaining expert financial staff.
- Ensuring that decision making is not limited by financial factors.
- Providing access to a [school condition allocation](#) (five academies and 3000 pupils), replacing the need to bid for funding through the [Condition Improvement Fund](#).

Operations

Growth should enable operational harmony, including;

- Coordination of operations across the schools
- Attract, train and retain expert operations staff
- Ensure the highest level of trustee and governor training
- Ensure the capacity for high quality assurance.

Community

Growth should increase our capacity to engage with our community by;

- Recruiting a Trust PR manager
- Providing greater support from PLMR for PR
- Ensuring that each school has a lead on parental engagement
- Growth should take place in close geographical proximity. Initially within south Lancashire, Bolton and Wigan.

Every time a new school joins the trust there will be a review of those areas that should be aligned and standardised. There is no assumption that the way it has been done, is the way it should be done.

HOW WE MIGHT GROW

GROWTH PLANS

A possible growth journey

PRE SEPTEMBER 2020

- Recruit two additional members.
- Recruit Trust board up to 10 trustees based on skills.
- Segregate Members from Trust Board.

2021 JOIN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ONE OTHER GOOD SCHOOL

- Strengthen skills of the Trust Board by recruiting additional trustees as required from both schools.
- Refine Trustees and Local Governors' induction programme.
- Retrain existing governors and trustees in Nolan Principles and specific responsibilities.
- Share common policies between schools.
- Bring together financial management.
- Plan shared facilities.

2022 – PREPARE FOR THIRD SCHOOL TO JOIN

- Review impact of trust on the quality of teaching and learning in the schools.
- Refine reporting to Members, Trust Board and Local Governing Body to ensure complementary information and transparency and to support senior staff workload.
- Establish joint curriculum-led financial planning; joint purchases; internal payroll.
- Review and refine information for new schools.

2023- THIRD, GOOD SCHOOL TO JOIN THE TRUST

- Review capacity to sponsor.
- Trust board up to 12, with 2 trustees provided by third school.

2024 - FOURTH SCHOOL TO JOIN THE TRUST; EITHER SPONSORED OR CONVERTOR

- Review membership of LGCs and Trust Board, in line with term of office ending for Year 1 Trustees
- New trustees and LGC governors recruited based on need

- Review effectiveness of Trust Board committees
- Review transition arrangements of third school
- Pool GAG to enable spending based on highest area of improvement need.

KEY ROLES GROWTH

2 Schools	3 Schools	5 Schools
CEO	Extra maths teacher	Extra English teacher
Executive Headteacher	IT Technician (per school)	COO
CFO	Marketing Lead	Deputy CFO
HR Manager		
Estates Manager		
IT Manager		
Company Secretary		
Clerk to trustees		

SOURCES

The economic benefits of joining, establishing or growing a multi-academy trust, 2017

Multi-academy trusts: benefits, challenges and functions, 2019

Multi-academy trusts: Good practice guidance and expectations for growth, 2016

Quantitative analysis of the characteristics and performance of multi-academy trusts, 2017

Fight or flight? How 'stuck' schools are overcoming isolation: evaluation report, 2020