

## Summary of questions from parents, carers and other interested parties

### Parents & Carers

Parents and carers were invited to attend a public meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023, alongside having access to an online form and email address to share their feedback.

Across all responses from parents and carers there is mixed support for the proposal – with some sharing a very positive, supporting tone to the proposed transfer and others with strong views opposed to the proposal. The summary of responses can be found below:

#### **1. Research into MATs – What was the process and why not fully transparent?**

Parents and carers enquired as to the process undertaken by Trustees in searching for a MAT to transfer QEGS and the lack of transparency involved around other trusts and their responses. Questions were asked on the level of responses received from invited MATs and why this has not been shared in full.

#### ***School response***

The trustees have communicated with parents and carers the process agreed by Trustees in searching and selecting a MAT. As you are aware, the process to identify potential MATs had a number of stages, including a desktop search using public data to identify a range of potential MATs. This was reduced to a smaller number of MATs which were then reviewed by Trustees through further scrutiny of public data to select four MATs to approach for expressions of interest.

Trustees asked these four MATs to submit expressions of interest, one didn't. Three entered into conversations with us, of those three one chose not to submit an expression of interest. We received two completed expressions of interest, both we felt could meet that trust vision and therefore both were invited to present to the trustees at the final stage. The chosen MAT has then been shared with all for consultation.

Confidentiality has been key through this process, and this has been explained to parents on a number of occasions and publicly. It is our view that this process has been robust, fair, and transparent for all parties.

#### **2. Can we avoid a MAT altogether?**

Some parents were keen to voice their support for avoiding a transfer to a MAT altogether.

#### ***School response***

The transfer for QEGS to a MAT is a requirement of our Notice to Improve. The DfE has given trustees the freedom to search and select a MAT of its choice, however the requirement to join a MAT cannot be changed.

#### **3. Can we avoid the requirement of the Notice to Improve?**

Some parents expressed a desire to challenge the DfE and ESFA on the findings of the investigation and therefore the requirements set out in the Notice to Improve.

***School response***

This is for Trustees to consider. The school, having engaged with the DfE, ESFA and Trustees, are complying with the requirements of the Notice to Improve as there are greater risks to the school by not doing so.

**4. Is the decision irreversible?**

Some parents requested a clear understanding of whether the decision to join CLLT is irreversible.

***School response***

This was confirmed to parents at the public meeting. Trustees should be aware that should circumstance change in the future for the School or MAT, then QEGS may move MAT, however this is highly unlikely to happen.

**5. Can the advantages and disadvantages of each Trust be shared with parents?**

A theme of parents wanting to understand the advantages and disadvantages of each Trust was consistent throughout this process. This aligns to the concerns raised over understanding which other trusts were involved and what negotiations had been had with Trusts.

***School response***

Trustees have been clear that this is consultation process for QEGS to join CLLT. This consultation is not a positive vs. negatives process for parents.

Trustees set out their priorities and shared these with parents and the wider school community. On this basis they have considered the merits of each Trust through its search and selection process and has proposed a Trust for QEGS to join. It was a condition of entering into discussions with other MATs that their involvement remain confidential if we did not choose progress.

**6. Flawed & frustrated processes.**

Some parents at the parent meeting and via email responses shared that frustration at the process not being 'transparent' and not the Trust not doing enough to push back on the Notice to Improve.

***School response***

We have been crystal clear with parents in communicating the requirements of the Notice to Improve, and the Trustees endeavours to meet these conditions. We have also been clear at each stage what information can be shared and what cannot.

**7. Finances**

**a. How will the debt be repaid?**

**b. Can the budget be published to confirm this is affordable?**

**c. Reserves**

Parents wanted to understand how the debt will be repaid in the future and how will this impact the children and at the school. Parents also asked for full details of the repayment plan and the impact to budgets and reserves.

***School response***

A repayment plan will be agreed with the ESFA upon the confirmation of Trustees that the transfer is agreed. Due to confidentiality, the sharing of budgets will not occur.

**8. How will this affect admissions in the future?**

Parents shared a number of concerns that admissions arrangements will change due to the transfer of QEGS.

***School response***

CLLT has confirmed that admissions arrangements will not change post transfer – this remains the responsibility of the school.

**9. Can the scheme of delegation be shared?**

***School response***

This is available on the CLLT website. <https://changinglives.education/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/22-12-01-Scheme-of-Delegation-for-Changing-Lives.pdf>

**10. What safeguards will be in place to prevent over-extension of CLLT in the future?**

Questions were raised on the potential growth of CLLT in the future and the recurrence of financial issues and what safeguards are in place to prevent a recurrence of the situation faced today.

***School response***

Whilst having a Accounting Officer at CLLT like QEGS, there are a number of layers of governance and leadership within CLLT to prevent a situation like this occurring again. The DfE and ESFA have approved CLLT as a sponsor and each new school that joins CLLT is approved by the Advisory Board before being allowed to transfer. The DfE Advisory Board considers the Trusts capacity to support any proposed growth and will not approve a transfer where it deems the Trust unable meet the needs of the school.

**11. What happens if the school or MAT fails in the future?**

***School response***

It is the view of trustees that this is highly unlikely to happen. The school provided a response to the question from parents at the meeting and set out the DfE process of rebrokering or ESFA intervention.

**12. Will staff be shared across the Trust?**

Some parents raised concerns on the movement of staff after transfer.

***School response***

Assurances were provided to parents that staff employed by the school will continue to work at the school. There may be opportunities for growth and development in the future and school at the school will be welcome to apply for these opportunities.

**13. How will this transfer affect the recruitment of high-quality staff in the future?**

***School response***

This is low risk. A MAT based system is well established in England, so staff are aware of Trusts and how they operation.

**14. What autonomy might be lost because of this decision?**

Various questions were raised by parents on a range of topics including curriculum, behaviour, uniform, trips, etc. etc. that concerns the school's ability to make, and effect change and decision making.

***School response***

Trustees have scrutinised the scheme of delegation and are satisfied that this aligns to the priorities set out at the start of the search process, which included the retention of autonomy.

**15. How well was the public meeting marketed?**

There were a few comments via the online form that parents were unaware of the public consultation meeting.

***School response***

The details of the public meeting were in the consultation document which was shared with all registered parents and interested parties with 13 days notice of the meeting.

**16. How will CLLT retain the history of QEGS?**

***School response***

Trustees were keen as part of the selection process that the history of QEGS is respected and retained through the process of joining a Trust. Trustees assessed this element against each Trust shortlisted and were content that each expression of interest honoured the history of QEGS, and the Senior Leadership of the school support this view.

**17. What assurances/ details can you provide that careful due diligence has been performed on the competencies of the leadership team of CLLT.**

The Leadership Team of CLLT is made up of the CEO, Deputy CEO, Operations Director, Finance Director, Governance and Assurance Director alongside the Head Teacher of each School in the Trust.

This structure was set out in the Expression of Interest, and it was confirmed that the team had a range of qualifications, many of which are far beyond the basic requirement of the role they undertake. The structure of the leadership team is also available in the published Annual Accounts. The Headteacher of QEGS will join the leadership team of CLLT at the point of transfer.

It is a matter of public records that CLLT works across the across county and nationally in delivering NPQH and NLE qualifications. The CEO works a national level to influence best practice and provide support to schools. CLLT leads the regions Teaching School. All of these things are an indicator of the leadership capacity of CLLT which were reviewed by Trustees.

**19. As the Changing Lives Learning Trust is a new MAT with only a few schools, how can you guarantee that its future (and the future of QEGS) is secure.**

We can't and we couldn't with any Trust. Trustees have evaluated the risk and decided that this is a low risk and no greater than any other Trusts considered. All MATs in England are subject to an Annual Review with their DfE Regional Director, for which both Trusts reviewed were viewed as capable for growth.

**20. What happens to the school if the MAT fails, either financially or educationally?**

Worst case...All of the schools in the Trust would be re-brokered to other MATs or the whole MAT is taken over.

**21. Have you considered a potential fall in applications for teaching posts as a result of being in this MAT?**

Yes – and we consider this to be a low risk. MATs are a part of our national education picture and being recruited into a MAT as a teacher is a known quantity for many. We are pleased with current applications for posts advertised.

**22. Will teaching posts be shared between West Lakes Academy and QEGS.**

- a. Will CLLT be able to change a staff's location once the contract has been issued
- b. i.e., does the staff contract protect staff from being seconded elsewhere.

No – all rights will be transferred and protected under TUPE, which includes a clear place of work being defined.

**23. Will staff have teaching autonomy on how to teach their subjects, so that no scheme is imposed from CLLT.**

- a. If CLLT can impose a scheme on to a department at QEGS then have you considered the impact on teacher retention.
- b. Does QEGS retain the power to reject a new scheme of working if it is happy with the one that it is using.

CLLT does not centralise the curriculum or have a preferred model for delivery. One of the key drivers that makes CLLT attractive compared to other MATs is that their vision is centred around having different types of school within the trust who are all centres of excellence at what they do. This means that we not only retain the right to develop our own planning but that is actively desired, and this will enable other trust schools to ask us for help with supporting the most able students, in the same we can seek help from other trust schools where we find areas of challenge.

**24. Can you please publish the budget that documents how savings of 6% of GAG funding is going to be met in the short and medium term and what impact that will have on our children.**

No – it is our assessment that this will be met by removing costs of services currently bought in and using this to fund the 6% contribution.

**25. What is the payback schedule for the £1.5m debt - we strongly feel that after all that the ESFA has done, any write offs of the debt need to be openly admitted?**

A payment plan has yet to be agreed with the ESFA. This cannot be done before the consultation has concluded and Trustees have made a final decision. This is due to the fact the liability of this payment plan will ultimately sit with the new Trust and not QEGS on its own, therefore they need to be involved and agree to its terms. We will have a confirmed repayment prior to transfer that is considered realistic by all parties.

**26. What do you believe are the disadvantages of entering a MAT and in particular this CLLT MAT?**

It is inevitable that some decision making afforded to us today due to our Single Academy Status will be removed and therefore is the key disadvantage. We have reviewed the Scheme of Delegation for all MAT's that Expressed an Interest, and we are satisfied with the balance between Trust and School decision making with CLLT. Our own Scheme of Delegation and that of CLLT are available on each respective website for comparison.

It should also be noted that we are clear, given the ESFA report, having a Trust board with professional expertise and well-established, complaint frameworks for decision making will benefit QEGS in the long term.

**27. What specific levels of autonomy remain with the school and what are being taken by the MAT. Please provide thorough information around what decisions will remain the school's and what will be lost.**

Scheme of delegation is published on CLLT website. Key decisions are still taken at school level. Significant change by the school would need to be taken for approval (as is the case now with our Trust Board).

**28. What is the driver behind this decision? We know it, but many parents do not.**

We have a Notice to Improve which stipulates QEGS must join a MAT.

**29. Will Trustees inform the stakeholders that this is an irreversible decision.**

Yes, we can confirm this decision is irreversible.

**30. You have stated that you invited 4 MATs to provide expressions of interest. Did this include CLLT? How many of these chose to express an interest please, other than CLLT? And how many of them, other than CLLT, were invited to present to the Trustees?**

Yes, this did include CLLT. One Trust chose not to respond despite many efforts to engage with them. One entered into discussions about submitting an EOI but subsequently decided against a submission. Two trusts (including CLLT) did complete an EOI. Trustees considered both EOIs to have merit against the Trust Priorities and therefore both were invited to present to the Trust Board (and both did).

**31. You state that CLLT has £497k of 'free reserves', i.e., unrestricted reserves, and that CLLT has the capacity to repay the Grant, of £1.5 million. Please could you explain the basis for the statement that it has the capacity to repay the Grant, i.e., how will it do that, especially as at this point, no repayment plan has been agreed with ESFA?**

CLLT also have a £2.3m endowment which means, if they wanted to, they have the capacity to pay off the debt tomorrow. However, we do not expect that CLLT (or any Trust approached) would use their existing trust reserves to repay a debt which QEGS is required to pay. No payment plan is agreed, nor will it be until a final decision by the Trust Board is made in relation to joining CLLT. At this point we expect the DFE to engage in negotiations regarding the repayment plan with CLLT, as it would ultimately become their responsibility as the 'receiving Trust'.

**32. My main concern is that pupils that would normally not have gained admission to QEGS will via a back door gain access due to an internal "managed move". The rights of an individual pupil with E.G., disruptive behaviour must not be allowed to impinge on the rights of the other pupils in the class to an education.**

**What binding guarantees will we be given that poorly behaving pupils in the associated schools are not moved into QEGS to the detriment of those who have worked so hard to achieve their place?**

The school works with local partner schools currently to facilitate 'managed moves' where it is able to as part of its wider moral commitment to the education of students across the county. As QEGS is a selective school, it is always a requirement that a student will have passed our in year entrance test. There will be no change to this arrangement,

**33. If we join CLLT will the selection criteria change for entry into year 7?**

Trustees have spent a significant amount of time reviewing the Admissions Policy this year. Under CLLT Admissions remains a matter delegated to schools and the local governing boards. CLLT will not determine any change in this regard.

**34. How was the 14th of March meeting publicised? I had no idea it was taking place and would have attended if I had known. Yet another attempt to sweep matters under the carpet. I would also like to know what actions are being considered / taken against the previous Board and [Building company]**

The details of the public meeting were in the consultation document which was shared with all registered parents and interested parties with 13 days notice of the meeting.

## Parent and carer meeting

Date: 14th March 2023

Invited Attendees: All Parents and Local Community Stakeholders

Present: 4 Parents, CEO – CLLT, Deputy CEO CLLT, Headteacher & Chair - QEGS

After a short presentation from both QEGS and CLLT, questions were invited from attendees at the meeting. A record of the questions and responses can be found below:

**1. The deficit is a considerable amount of money, and we were wondering where that amount of money is coming from. – Services to children?**

(DM): By being in a MAT we have access to central services e.g., purchasing power, central service contracts and savings can be made here. At the moment QEGS use lots of ad hoc services that can be expensive.

**2. What happens to the £1.5m debt? What is financial impact on our children? E.g., You talk about buying equipment but where is that money coming from?**

(JJ): As with the previous answer, savings made through collective purchasing power as an example. Monitoring budgets by holding regular meetings between governors and trustees on how budgets are being spent, everything is transparent across the MAT. Nothing hidden; easier to be open and transparent.

**3. You have £500K reserves so how is the debt going to be repaid?**

(JJ): As the previous answer. We also hold reserves and an £2.3 endowment fund.

**4. Is the 6% top slice to central fund restricted? Or can it be used to pay the debt? Also is the endowment restricted? What about the repayment plan?**

(JJ & DM): Endowment is unrestricted and can, by Trustee approval, be purposed but it will not be, nor will it be used to pay off the debt. The Trust could, in effect, loan QEGS the money so that we support QEGS to pay off the debt without it affecting the children's education nor using any funding for the schools already in the Trust. ESFA



still need to confirm the repayment plan. The repayment plan would not be to the detriment of the children.

**5. Pupils and Parents are highly stressed about the very sad situation, there have been too many bad decisions, will there be more bad decisions?**

(DM): QEGS have some reserves but not enough to pay £1.5M debt. As part of notice to improve by ESFA and DFE, QEGS must find a trust to work with.

**6. We attended the meeting last year on 12<sup>th</sup> May and asked JJ the question about the school funds, we were not told about the debt then. Our questions were not answered, and we have no respect and feel we were lied to. Everyone should be treated with respect.**

(JJ): I was aware at the time of the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> May about the financial situation, but it was not my place to make any statement. The MAT discussions started with QEGS before the debt was apparent. We engaged in discussions because of the benefit to the staff and the children especially because of our shared eligibility to be a Teaching School Hub. Our performance meant there was already alignment. When the debt became known, we are not in the habit of turning our back on a problem and so we remain committed to working with the school.

**7. You have told of the advantages of joining the MAT, what would be the disadvantages?**

(DM): There will always be some loss of autonomy but of those Trusts shortlisted CLLT represents the greatest retention of autonomy aligned to our priorities.

**8. What autonomy would this be?**

(DM): QEGS would function day to day as normal.

**9. You say the trust is all about our children (in slides), what way will this affect them? Don't understand impact on our children if we join this MAT?**

(DM): Understand your concerns but key day to day will be as normal, still have a local governing board and will still make strategic decisions in QEGS. However, if DM not addressing issues appropriately then the Trust offers another layer of support by checking on DM.

(JJ): The part loss of QEGS autonomy is as a result of financial decision making that took place in QEGS previously. ESFA notice will mean assured operation under correct regulations. JJ will be the accounting officer, however as multi-layer structure he is not sole decision maker.

With regard to spending impact on children as part of trust we asset tag all equipment and budgets are meticulously planned so that 3 years before the piece of equipment

is due to be replaced, we can manage this. This ensures all children have best resources available to them seamlessly.

**10. As part of concerned parents' group, we feel traditional MAT is too far away from QEGS to make appropriate decisions, e.g., curriculum. We want to keep it real for the students. What risk is there to the curriculum? QEGS are doing a great job at the moment. Can decisions, e.g., curriculum, be overwritten by CLLT? Who has overall autonomy?**

(JJ): QEGS has autonomy of methods used all belong with the school. Curriculum driven by QEGS, it does not stand still though, and the Trust can look at new ideas and reach out to other parts of the country to look for expertise if needed and bring this information back to the Trust to use. There is no big central team that does curriculum, etc. we don't impose.

(DM): A lot of schools fit into existing MATs with big curriculum structures and templates for how to teach students. Changing Lives does not have this structure – it simply does not exist and therefore this is how QEGS cements its autonomy- by joining a trust that is not set up to direct curriculum. It is also clear from the Changing Lives vision (of having different types of school) that no single set of curriculum planning would be appropriate and therefore this potential loss of autonomy is low risk as we cannot see how a centralised system would be of benefit under the Changing Lives model.

**11. Would like to have seen the full scheme of delegation?**

(JJ): This is available on our website. It can read as cold and appear centralised but that is not how it works in practice and the pre-amble sets that out.

**12. No issue with scheme of delegation but need to see it?**

(JJ): Trust makes final decision as it also has legal responsibilities, local governing body make decisions which are presented to Trustees to ratify. The Trust board could not manage a large number of schools without LGB role. Happy to chat with anyone about the scheme of delegation.

(JJ): QEGS drive e.g., curriculum, Trust will advise and only step in if needed.

**13. Does MAT reserve this right when special measures or can they do it any time? Teachers at QEGS are great and very steady compared to WL, It is not the same as QEGS 450-year-old school that is consistently good, we have full confidence in QEGS, need reassurance that this will not change?**

(DM): financial controls are in place to protect this from ever happening again.

**14. Totally understand this and with the current academic standards of the school we need assurances that it will not be trifled with. Not reassured that MAT scheme is the right thing for QEGS.**

(DM): There is no MAT scheme to impose, and our standards academically may become even better. Our Notice to Improve clearly states we join a MAT.

**15. Please present the disadvantages to parents please.**

If part of curriculum not up to standard QEGS would speak to Trust for help and then if still no improvement, then QEGS would expect the Trust to step in.

**16. We want you to understand our views and concerns about joining a MAT.**

(DM): Understand concerns, but ultimate responsibility of school will be with a Trust (rather than 1 person). (JJ) The trust is driven to get best out of students, Trust won't hold QEGS back.

**17. Is there a way QEGS will substantiate its view on the MAT? Are we trusting JJ and is that it? The disadvantage of this is one day in future may have new CEO and then what happens will results fail? We need positives and negatives to be made clear. This consultation seems to be all about benefits, we feel we are forced into it and it's not really a consultation?**

(DM): It's not a positive or negatives exercise.

Ultimately decision to join is made by the QEGS' Trust Board and in the MAT, we will have a member on the Trust Board that feed information in. Decisions are made on information from the day-to-day people on the ground all the way through to the board.

(JJ): There are 9 strands of governance where local governors meet directly with Trustees. Curriculum, Learning and Teaching, Outcomes, Finance etc. In 2016 when I was appointed it was my vision, but it very quickly became the Trust's vision and therefore the Trustees are the custodians of their vision, and I am held accountable for achieving it. It will remain the same no matter who the CEO is.

**18. Back to scheme of delegation again it seems very centralised?**

(DM): I saw a different version when applying for HT role and it has not changed substantively since then but the way of being presented has been which can appear centralised.

**19. What happens if Trust overextends, and another MAT takes us over?**

(JJ): The DfE and ESFA consider us to be a strong MAT and capable of growth. However, our 3- and 5-year budget planning indicates to us where the risks are and if we were ever vulnerable there are multiple layers of intervention before we get to the final position of another MAT. Very low risk.

**20. What responses were there to the research stage and why were other MATs ruled out?**

(DM): Trustees considered all MATs during the research thoroughly and are happy that all questions had been asked and nothing has been missed.

**21. Who were the other trusts?**

(DM): One condition from other MATS during the research process was that MATs remain anonymous. This therefore cannot be shared.

**22. Is this decision irreversible?**

(DM): The decision to join a MAT is irreversible.

**23. With the Notice to improve is there any alternative? QEGS should issue a statement to say there is no alternative.**

(DM): To join a MAT is part of our Notice to Improve.

**24. Frustrated with consultation as said before, please do everything you can to avoid the MAT.**

(DM): Asked parents to submit any formal questions via email. The Trust Board are compelled to consider them.