



Department  
for Education

# **Do academies make use of their autonomy?**

**Research report**

**July 2014**

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## 1. Headline Findings

A representative online survey of 720 academies which were open on 1 May 2013 examined their uses of autonomy available to them to decide how best to run their schools. The **headline** findings were

### **Academies have used their freedoms to innovate and improve**

- 79 per cent have changed or plan to change their curriculum
- 90 per cent have procured or planned to procure services previously provided by the LA
- 84 per cent are now linking pay to performance

### **This is helping them raise standards for their pupils**

- Two thirds believe these changes have improved attainment
- The most important changes were seen to be those to the curriculum and leadership

### **It is also helping them to raise standards for pupils in other schools via collaboration**

- 87 per cent of academies support other schools (72 per cent support schools they did not support before becoming academies)
- 96 per cent of outstanding academies support other schools

## 2. Summary of main findings

### **Reasons for conversion**

- There was no dominant main reason for conversion but the most frequently cited were: to raise educational standards; to obtain more funding for front-line education; and to gain greater freedom to use funding as you see fit.
- Schools which converted to academy status shortly after May 2010 were more likely to do so for financial gain. More recent converters are more likely to do so for opportunities for collaboration.
- Those in Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and primary schools were more likely than standalone academies and secondary schools to say conversion was to enable collaboration.

### **Changes made since conversion**

- Academies have made a wide range of changes and change was more common in sponsored than converter academies and in secondary more than primary

academies.

- Almost 9 in 10 academies have procured services previously provided by their local authority (LA) from another source. Three quarters have changed (55 per cent) or plan to (24 per cent) change the curriculum they offer; and almost three quarters have formalised collaboration arrangements (60 per cent) or plan to (11 per cent).
- Only a small proportion (14 per cent) have changed (8 per cent) or plan to (6 per cent) change length of school day and 9 per cent have changed (4 per cent) or plan to (5 per cent) change school terms.
- Academies that have been open longer have made more changes. More recent openers have not yet planned to make all of the changes made by early academies.

### **Impact of changes made**

- Two thirds of academies believe that the changes they have made have improved attainment. This is especially the case for sponsored academies. The longer an academy has been open, the more likely they are to say the changes have substantially improved attainment.
- Increased collaboration, changes to the curriculum and school leadership were felt to have led to the biggest improvements in academies. Changes in leadership were seen as important especially in sponsored academies.

### **Use of non-QTS teachers**

- 16 per cent of academies have hired unqualified teachers but only five per cent of academies have any unqualified teachers who are not working towards QTS.
- Those open as academies longer are more likely to have hired a non QTS teacher.

### **Use of new curricula from Sept 2014**

- Mathematics (by 77 per cent of respondents), English (76 per cent) and Science (67 per cent) are the new curricula most likely to be used in September. Secondary academies are more likely than primary to follow the national curriculum for the majority of subjects which suggests innovation in the primary sector.

### **Change in volume of first choice applications**

- Over half of sponsored academies (66 per cent of secondary sponsored) and a third of converters reported an increase in first choice applications since becoming an academy.
- The longer an academy is open, the more likely they were to say they had experienced an increase in first choice applications.

### **Attitudes to borrowing funds**

- Views are evenly divided - a third of academies would like to be able to borrow funds, a third would not, and a third are unsure. Secondary academies are more interested in borrowing.
- Schools who became academies shortly after May 2010 were more likely to be interested in borrowing funds.

### **School-to-school support**

- 87 per cent of academies support other schools (91 per cent of converters and 74 per cent of sponsored). 72 per cent of academies support schools they did not support before conversion.
- Almost all academies rated outstanding by Ofsted support other schools (96 per cent).
- Academies often receive support from academies within a trust of which they are not a member, whether a member of different a MAT or not.

### **Managing teacher performance**

- Over half (53 per cent) of academies have changed how they monitor teacher performance – this was most common in sponsored and secondary academies.
- Around two thirds of academies monitor pupils' attainment and progress at least half-termly. Almost 90 per cent of sponsored academies do so.
- 84 per cent of academies explicitly link pay to performance.

### **3. Introduction**

Academies are independent state schools which are directly funded by the government. They provide greater freedom and flexibility to heads and teachers; promote innovation and diversity in the school system, with the aim of raising educational standards in academies and, through collaboration and competition, across the board. Every academy is required to set up an academy trust which is an exempt charity and company limited by guarantee. Every academy trust enters into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out the requirements which apply to individual academies and the conditions to which the payment of grant is subject.

There are a number of different types of academies. Some academies have sponsors while other schools convert to become academies without a sponsor. Many academies operate in chain arrangements while others operate autonomously. The first academies were mainly underperforming secondary schools but under the coalition government the programme was opened to all secondary, primary, special schools, pupil referral units and post-16 institutions. Free schools, university technical colleges (UTCs) and studio schools are new academies which open in direct response to parental and employer demand and aim to drive up standards in the communities they serve.

Academies have more autonomy than local authority maintained schools in a number of areas, including how they use the national curriculum and being able to hire teachers who do not hold qualified teacher status. Until now, the government has not collected information on exactly how academies are using their autonomy. This report presents the results of a survey which was designed to understand the reasons for schools becoming academies; the changes they have made since conversion; perceived impact of these changes; attitudes towards the new national curriculum; how they collaborate with other schools; and changes in the performance management of staff.

The results are analysed by the type of academy; school phase; length of time open; performance; and whether they are members of a MAT. It is important to note that the analysis shows where there are correlations between becoming academies and subsequent outcomes, rather than proven causation.

### **4. Methodology and sample**

A 15 minute online survey was sent to the 2919 academies open on 1st May 2013. Academies which converted after the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013 were excluded from the survey. The survey focused on changes made since becoming an academy so it was not appropriate to ask a number of the questions to recent converters. The survey was initially issued to academies on 24th February 2014 and fieldwork closed on 30th March 2014. A total of 720 academies replied (a response rate of 25 per cent). A short survey was also sent to a sample of LA maintained schools to act as a comparison group. Only sixty schools responded so the results have not been included in this report.

The breakdown of academies responding was as follows:

- 148 sponsored (72 primary, 74 secondary, 1 special and one all through)
- 572 converter (262 primary, 286 secondary, 18 special, 5 all through and 1 PRU)

Table 1 shows the survey is representative of the academy population

**Table 1 Survey respondents compared to the actual population**

	Survey proportion (%)	Population as May 2013 (%)
Proportion of academies - sponsored	21	24
Proportion of academies - converter	79	76
Proportion of academies - primary	48	43
Proportion of academies - secondary	52	57
Proportion of primary academies - sponsored	22	23
Proportion of primary academies - converter	78	77
Proportion of secondary academies – sponsored	21	24
Proportion of secondary academies - converter	79	76
Proportion of academies in a MAT	40	41
Proportion of primary academies in a MAT	48	51
Proportion of secondary academies in a MAT	33	34

Respondents were asked whether they were happy for the data matching to take place between their answers and the academy’s performance and administration data held by the Department for Education. 613 of the 720 (85 per cent) academies agreed to this data matching taking place. The analysis possible following this matching is included throughout the report.

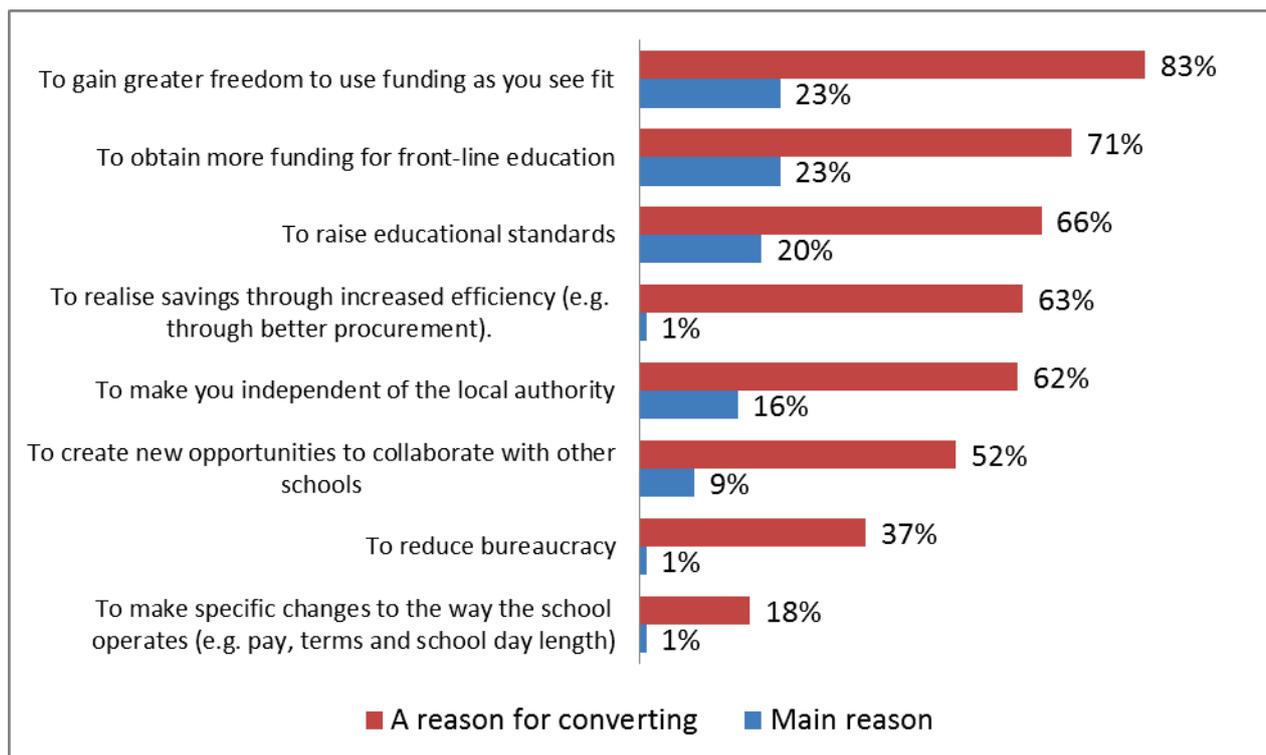
## 5. Reasons for becoming an academy

### Key finding

- There was no dominant main reason for conversion but the most frequently cited were: to raise educational standards; to obtain more funding for front-line education; and to gain greater freedom to use funding as you see fit.
- Schools which converted to academy status shortly after May 2010 were more likely to do so for financial gain. More recent converters are more likely to do so for opportunities for collaboration.
- Those in Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and primary schools were more likely than standalone academies and secondary schools to say conversion was to enable collaboration.

Converter academies were asked their reasons and main reason for becoming an academy. A wide range of motivations were cited (as shown in Figure 1) and no single factor dominated as the main reason for conversion.

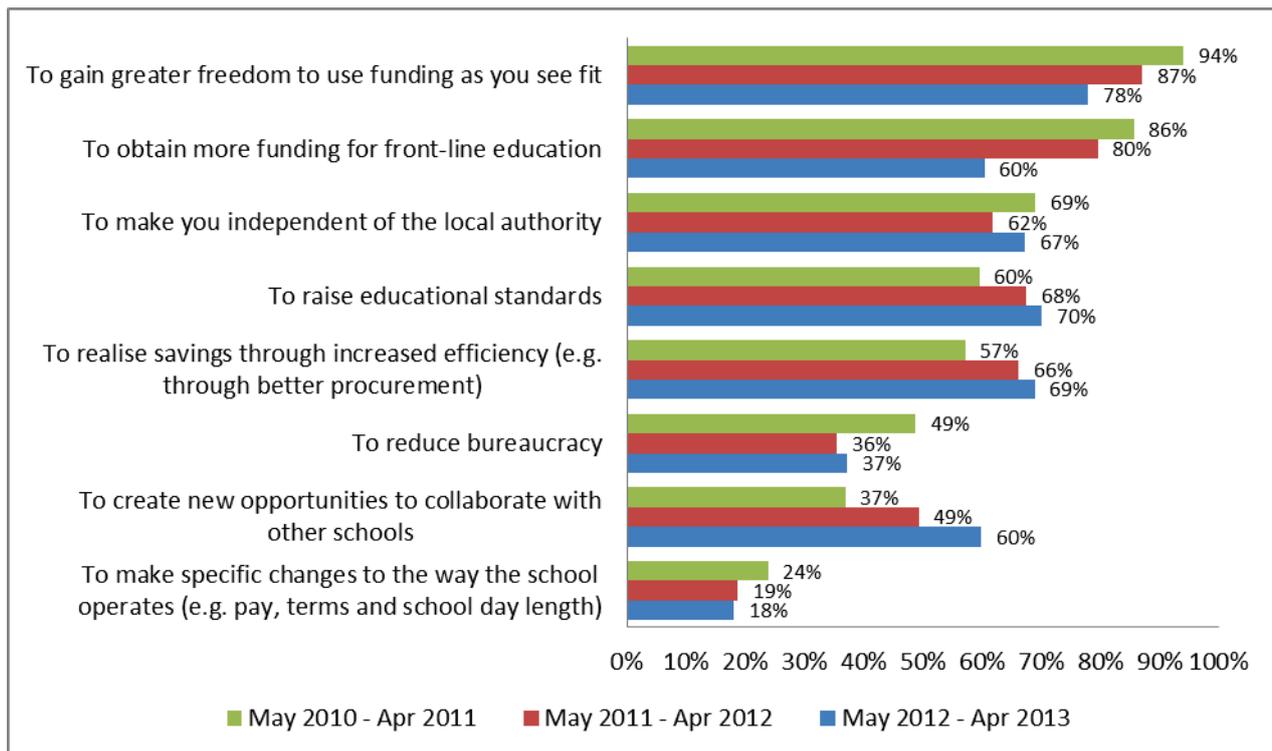
**Figure 1 - Reasons for converting and the main reason**



Base: All converter academies (572)

The reasons for converting have changed over time. Figure 2 shows the proportion of academies citing different reasons for converting depending on whether they were early or later converters. Data are presented for three different groups, those who converted in May 2010- Apr 11, May 2011- Apr 2012 and May 2012- Apr 2013. For early converters the main reasons were financial with 94 per cent wanting freedom to use the funding as they see fit and 86 per cent wanting more funding for front-line education. These figures fell to 78 per cent and 60 per cent for the more recent converters. This reflects that initially early converters received some extra funding. Some reasons have become more important over the last few years. For those who converted May 2010 – Apr 2011, only 37 per cent did so to create new opportunities to collaborate with other schools; for the most recent converters this figure was 60 per cent. Other shifts were to realise savings through increased efficiencies 57 per cent for early converters to 69 per cent for more recent; and to raise educational standards increasing from 60 per cent to 70 per cent.

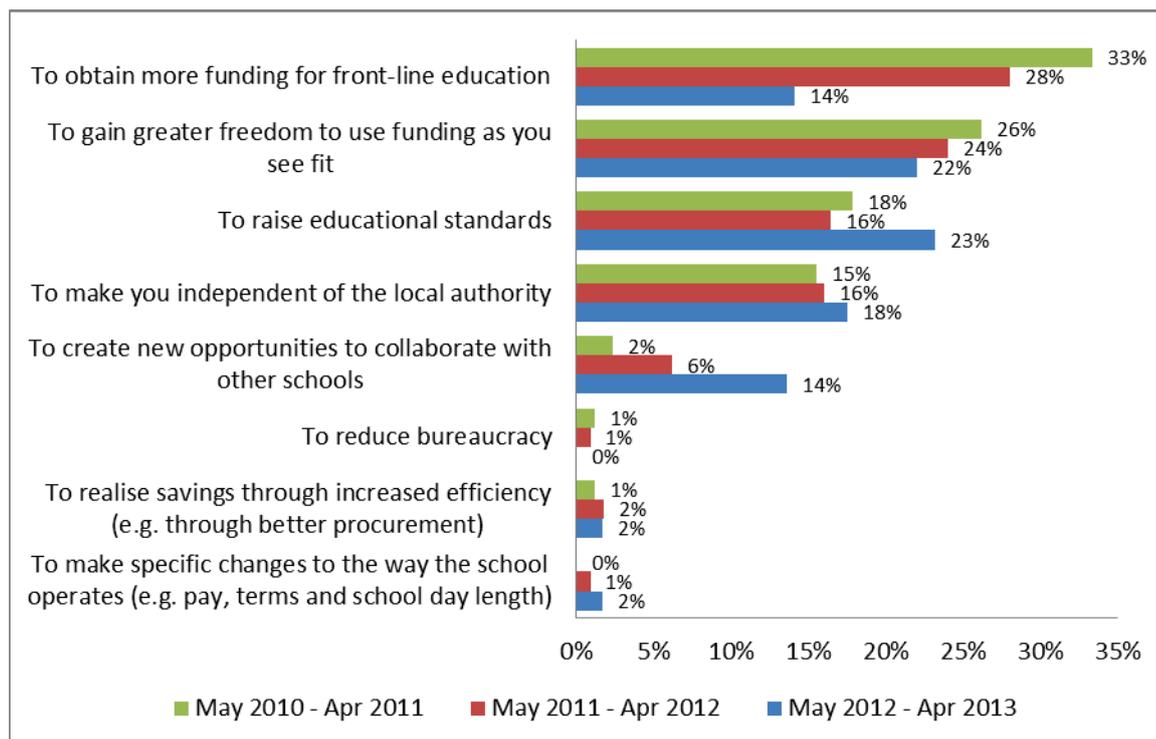
**Figure 2: Change in reasons for converting by date**



Base: May 2010- Apr 2011 84, May 2011- Apr 2012 225, May 2012- Apr 2013 177

As demonstrated in Figure 3 there are significant differences between early and more recent converters with regards to the main reason for converting. For 33 per cent of those who converted between May 2010 and April 2011 obtaining more funding for front-line education was the main reason compared to only 14 per cent for the more recent converters. In comparison only 2 per cent of early converters said the main reason was to create new opportunities for collaboration compared to 14 per cent of the more recent converters.

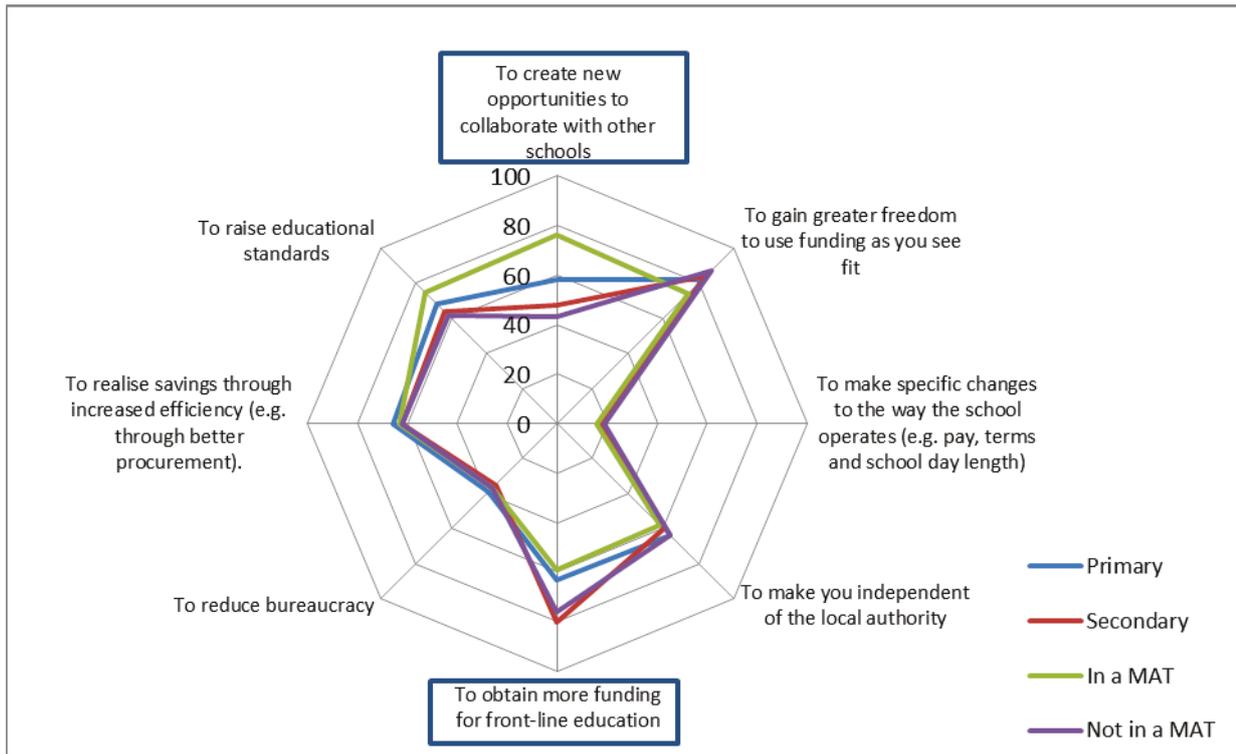
**Figure 3: Change in the main reason for converting by date**



Base: May 2010- Apr 2011 84, May 2011- Apr 2012 225, May 2012- Apr 2013 177

The data were analysed by the phase of schools and whether they were members of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) (more recent converters are slightly more likely to be in a MAT than early converters). As shown in Figure 4, there were some differences in motivation between these groups. Primary schools and those in a MAT were more likely to convert to allow better collaboration; whereas secondary schools were more likely to convert due to the desire for more funding.

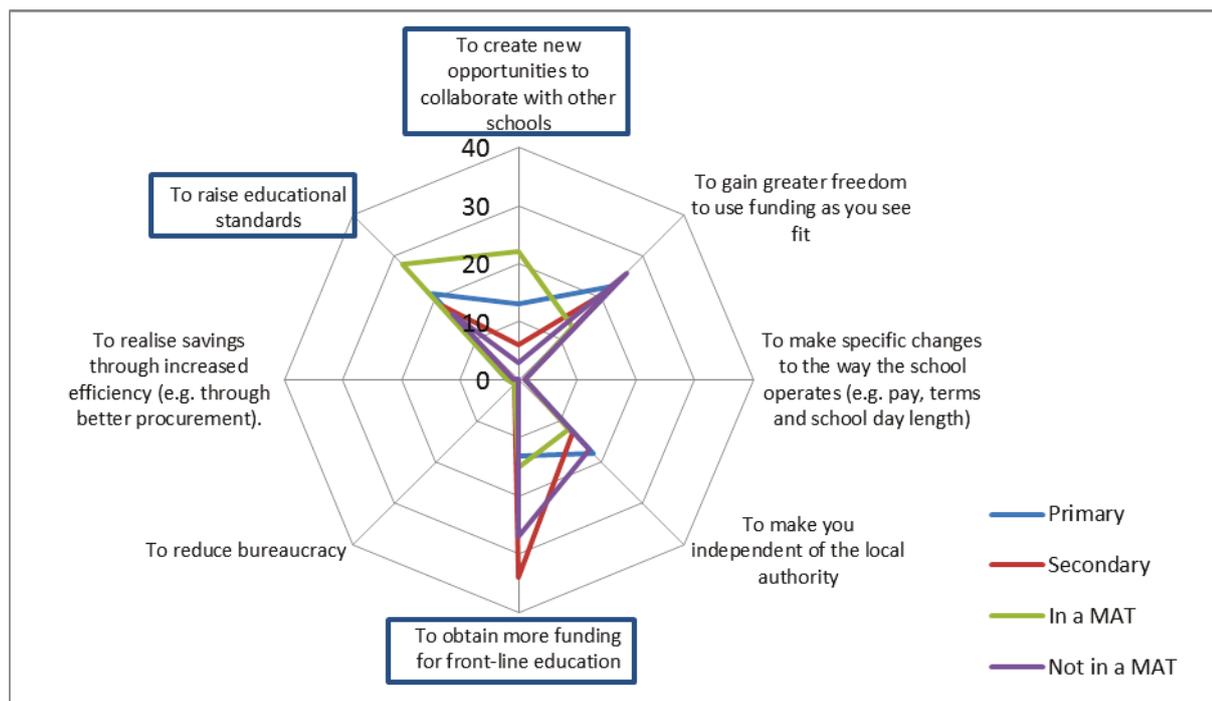
**Figure 4: Reasons for converting by MAT and phase**



Base: Primary 262, Secondary 286, In a MAT 167 and Not in a MAT 405

Figure 5 shows that to create new opportunities for collaboration and to raise educational standards were significantly more likely to be the most important reason for academies in a MAT and primary schools. The most common reason for secondary schools and those not in a MAT was to obtain more funding for front line education.

**Figure 5: The main reason by MAT and phase**



Base: Primary 262, Secondary 286, In a MAT 167 and Not in a MAT 405

### Reasons explained in detail

Academies were asked to explain the main reason for their conversion in detail. The explanations were varied but some reason-specific issues were reported. For example, the role of the LA was often mentioned when schools were discussing funding-related reasons for conversion. Some typical examples can be found below and are grouped under three headings; control over spending decisions, to create opportunities for collaboration and seeing becoming an academy as a natural progression.

#### Control over spending decisions

*“We wanted to use the traditionally top-sliced LA money in the way we thought was most appropriate rather than allowing a LA that was not on the same wavelength as us educationally to decide for us how the money was spent.”*

*“We were not satisfied with all of the services being offered by the LA. We wanted greater freedoms to secure our own personnel, that was both cost efficient and of the very best quality. This included educational psychology, specialist SEN support and more appropriate CPD.”*

*“Frustration with LA's paternalistic attitude towards schools and an old fashioned 'public service' mentality which lacks an adaptive entrepreneurial spirit. Top slicing of money for inefficient services. Lack of control over our own bank account, so we could withhold money when necessary. As a VA Catholic school we had already used freedoms to the full and this move towards further independence was welcome. Also like finance year and*

*academic year alignment for planning - I feel academy status enables us to spend money where it matters - on teaching and learning.”*

*“As a leading school we became tired of how under performing schools were getting additional funding from the LA and they did not have the impact to sort out these schools by sorting the leadership out. It kept happening year on year. We also felt we were not getting value for services and money was been squandered at LA level. We had already been operating and running the school as a business with our children as shareholders and investing in our facilities and teaching and learning. By becoming a sponsor academy we could invest further in our own school and impact further on standards but also use our successful model in other failing schools which had issues. Having only worked in failing schools and turning them around, it was always the system leadership and operations that let school expectations and culture of blame on context creep in. By being a sponsor academy we could not just be a plaster stuck on for a re-occurring period every couple of months but actively sorts out the school at root and creates a culture of success.”*

Where academies converted to create opportunities for collaboration, they were able to provide a clear explanation of their reasoning.

### **To create opportunities for collaboration**

*“We have used Academic freedoms to work with schools that we choose to work with in both state and private sectors.”*

*“We can share staff more easily, share governance and leadership. Procurement and management is much easier. We can hold each other to account in a professional manner creating a school led system.”*

*“The academy chain we decided to join has a clear focus on raising standards through school to school support. We were already part of a very strong locality group working collaboratively to secure the best possible outcomes for all the children and families we serve. We joined the academy chain as a group. We also felt that the LA was not going to be in the position to offer the support we required to raise standards, as there was an evidence of support services for schools being withdrawn.”*

*“In our village, there is an infant school and a junior school. By joining together in a multi academy trust the working partnership between the two schools has been strengthened. The needs of the children are now more effectively addressed and the whole community has benefitted from the high quality teaching and learning to be found in both establishments.”*

### **Saw becoming an academy as a natural progression**

*“Small primary... with an outstanding OFSTED inspection (including grade 1 for governance) conversion was a natural progression for us. We did not have, or need, any*

*support from the LA. We supported other schools with school improvement. Governors decided Academy status would allow us to match funds to meet the needs of the children. We have since become an official sponsor and formed a MAT to further provide effective partnership, sharing of resources for the benefit of staff and our children.”*

*“Having the freedom, that Academy status gives us, was the key for our original application. We are in the driving seat and can set our own 'blue prints' for systems and procedures. We are keen to develop as a sponsor to support other schools and raise educational standards for more students.”*

## 6. Changes planned or made since becoming an academy

### Key findings

- Academies have made a wide range of changes and change was more common in sponsored than converter academies and in secondary more than primary academies.
- Almost 9 in 10 academies have procured services previously provided by their local authority (LA) from another source. Three quarters have changed (55 per cent) or plan to (24 per cent) change the curriculum they offer; and almost three quarters have formalised collaboration arrangements (60 per cent) or plan to (11 per cent).
- Only a small proportion (14 per cent) have changed (8 per cent) or plan to (6 per cent) change length of school day and 9 per cent have changed (4 per cent) or plan to (5 per cent) change school terms.
- Academies who have been open longer have made more changes. More recent openers have not yet planned to make all of the changes made by early academies.

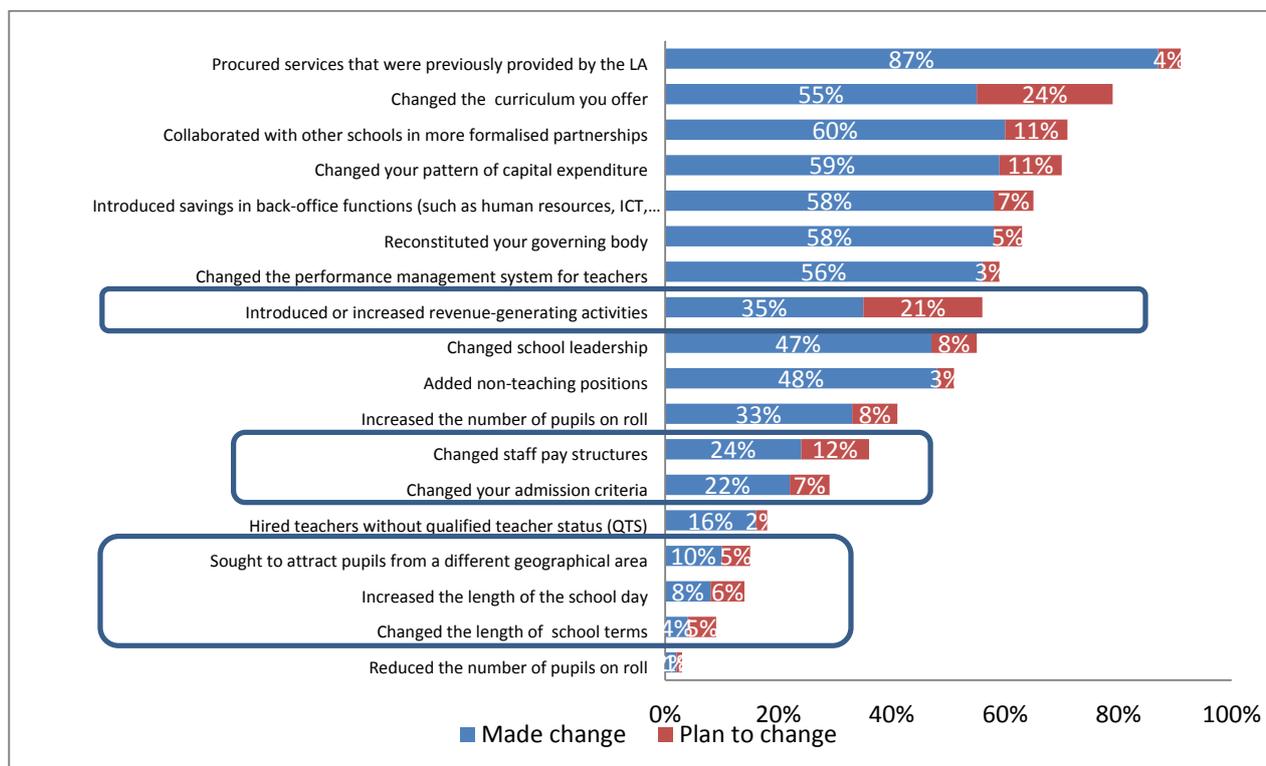
All academies were asked what changes they had made since becoming an academy and whether they planned any for the future.

Almost 9 in 10 academies have procured services previously provided by their local authority (LA) from somewhere else. Three quarters have either already changed or plan to change the curriculum they offer. Around two thirds of academies have either already changed or planned to make changes to; collaborating more formally with other schools and changing the pattern of capital expenditure/savings from back office functions.

Academies appear to make their intended changes relatively quickly. Some changes appear to take longer to implement with a relatively large proportion planning to change compared to already changed. For example, although over half have changed the curriculum they offer, a further quarter plan to but have not yet done so. As highlighted in Figure 6, other changes such as introducing revenue generating activities, changing staff pay structures, changing term dates and the length of the school day; are areas which are planned for a relatively large proportion of academies in comparison to how many have made the change. The only changes which were still planned by substantial proportions of respondents were changes to the curriculum offered and introducing

revenue-generating activities. Changes which had only been made by small proportions of academies so far were also only planned by small proportions.

**Figure 6: Changes made (or planned) since becoming an academy**



Base: All academies 720

As would be expected, the longer an academy has been open, the more changes they have made. Table 2 shows the proportion of academies who have made each possible change who opened in the time periods Pre May 2010, May 2010- April 11, May 2011- April 2012 and May 2012- April 2013. The changes highlighted in yellow are those where there is little difference between academies who have been open for longer than those becoming academies more recently. This suggests these changes can be made fairly instantaneously.

**Table 2: Changes made by academies by opening date**

	pre May 2010	May 2010 - Apr 2011	May 2011 - Apr 2012	May 2012 - Apr 2013
Procured services that were previously provided by the LA	78%	86%	91%	84%
Changed your pattern of capital expenditure	65%	77%	65%	48%
Introduced savings in back-office functions	70%	73%	61%	55%
Collaborated with other schools in more formalised partnerships	70%	66%	58%	59%
Changed the curriculum you offer	74%	64%	61%	47%
Reconstituted your governing body	65%	63%	53%	65%
Changed school leadership	87%	59%	44%	44%
Changed the performance management system for teachers	74%	59%	59%	54%
Introduced or increased revenue-generating activities	48%	57%	38%	26%
Added non-teaching positions	70%	57%	57%	39%
Increased the number of pupils on roll	61%	45%	33%	28%
Changed staff pay structures	30%	35%	26%	17%
Changed your admission criteria	43%	32%	26%	14%
Hired teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS)	48%	28%	16%	11%
Sought to attract pupils from a different geographical area	13%	16%	14%	6%
Increased the length of the school day	39%	10%	7%	4%
Changed the length of school terms	9%	5%	6%	2%
Reduced the number of pupils on roll	4%	3%	1%	2%
Base size	23	100	240	250

Table 2 shows that academies who have been open longer have made more changes. An obvious hypothesis from this finding is that later openers would be planning to make more future changes than the early ones. Table 3 shows that this is only the case for a few changes i.e. changing the curriculum, introducing revenue-generating activities and changing the pattern of external expenditure. This suggests that, on average, the schools more eager to innovate converted relatively quickly, whereas more recent converters do not yet plan to make as many changes to the way they operate.

**Table 3: Changes planned by academies by opening date**

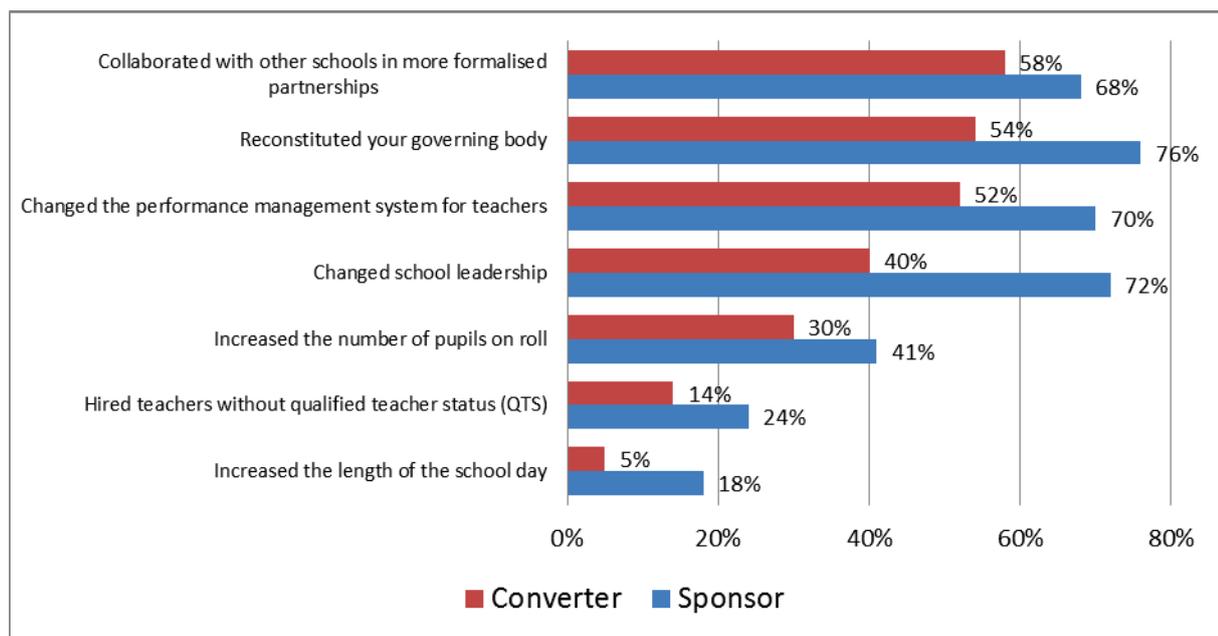
	pre May 2010	May 2010 - Apr 2011	May 2011 - Apr 2012	May 2012 - Apr 2013
Changed the curriculum you offer	9%	16%	20%	32%
Introduced or increased revenue-generating activities	13%	12%	18%	27%
Collaborated with other schools in more formalised partnerships	13%	12%	10%	12%
Changed staff pay structures	17%	9%	9%	14%
Changed school leadership	4%	8%	6%	10%
Changed your admission criteria	9%	8%	5%	6%
Increased the length of the school day	4%	7%	6%	6%
Increased the number of pupils on roll	9%	6%	8%	8%
Introduced savings in back-office functions	4%	5%	6%	9%
Procured services that were previously provided by the LA	4%	5%	3%	6%
Changed your pattern of capital expenditure	9%	4%	5%	18%
Sought to attract pupils from a different geographical area	17%	4%	4%	6%
Reconstituted your governing body	0%	4%	5%	5%
Changed the performance management system for teachers	4%	4%	2%	3%
Added non-teaching positions	4%	3%	3%	4%
Changed the length of school terms	4%	2%	7%	6%
Hired teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS)	4%	1%	2%	2%
Reduced the number of pupils on roll	4%	1%	1%	1%
Base	23	100	240	250

### Changes made by different types of academy

There were some noticeable differences in the changes made by sponsored and converter academies. Sponsored academies were typically previously struggling schools, so it was perhaps to be expected that changes would be more likely in these academies. Figure 7 presents all of the changes which sponsored academies were statistically more likely to make than converter academies. The biggest difference is that 72 per cent of sponsored academies have changed their senior leadership compared to 40 per cent of converters. There is also a large difference in the proportion who have reconstituted their governing body. This shows that sponsors improve the performance of schools by making fundamental changes to the way they are run.

Converter academies were not statistically more likely to make any of the changes, compared to sponsored.

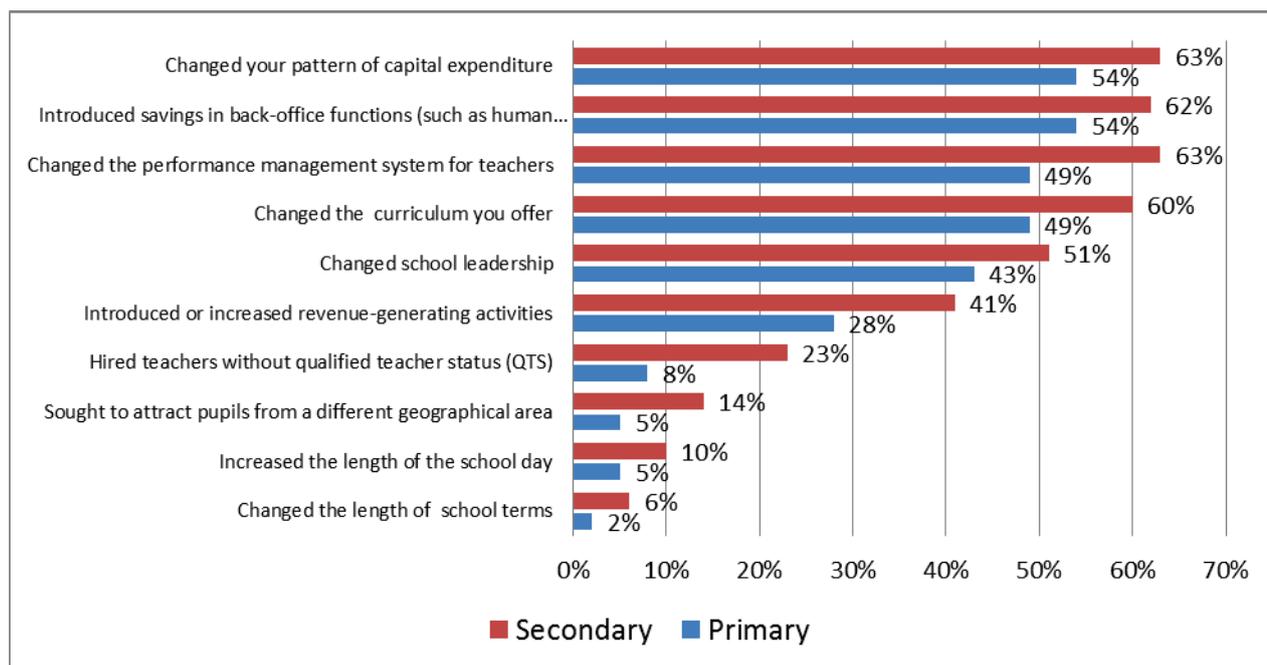
**Figure 7: Significant differences in changes made since becoming an academy between sponsored and converter academies**



Base: Sponsored academies 148 and Converter academies 572

Figure 8 shows those changes that were significantly more likely to be made by secondary schools than primary. Many of the biggest differences are related to finance. Of the changes made by a minority of academies, there is a large disparity between the proportions of secondaries and primaries hiring unqualified teachers, increasing the length of the school day and seeking pupils from a different geographical area.

**Figure 8: Significant differences in changes made since becoming an academy between primary and secondary academies**



Base: Secondary academies 360 and Primary academies 334

Respondents were asked to identify any other changes they had made. Some were clear that these changes would not have been possible without academy status.

*“We have opened an academically selective sixth form. We would not have been able to open a 6th form as an LA school. The LA is firmly opposed to school-based 6th forms. We are now able to recruit high quality Russell Group trained teachers. Academic standards are very high. We are now the highest performing school in [the LA] and by far the most oversubscribed school!”*

*“Rebranded the school - changed the name, ethos, values, aspirations of all students and staff. Formalised the uniform code, brought in tighter discipline structures and had a zero tolerance approach to poor behaviour. Brought in a rigorous quality assurance system allied to performance management and CPD. Brought in a team of consultants to support whole school development of teaching and learning. Refurbished key areas within the school restructured SLT roles and responsibilities to suit the needs of the school. Joined the PIXL organisation and followed closely their principles to help student achievement. Replaced unsatisfactory teachers and middle leaders by being committed to a 'students first' approach.”*

*“Collaborated with schools outside the local region. we reallocated finances to increase the amount of 1:1 support for children. We appointed additional teaching support and have applied for capital funding.”*

## Changes academies are unable to make

Academies were asked to explain any changes they had wanted to make but had so far been unable to do so. 18 per cent reported that they were unable to make at least one change they would have liked, most commonly a change to the length of school terms (reported by 4 per cent of academies); changes to capital expenditure (4 per cent); increasing revenue generating activities (4 per cent); changes to staff pay (3 per cent); and increasing the length of the school day (3 per cent).

These academies were asked what prevented them from making their desired changes. The most common responses were: lack of funding/capital (27 per cent); issues with TUPE (9 per cent); and causing problems for families with children in different schools (7 per cent).

Some academies articulated how they felt constrained by issues beyond their control.

*“Difficult to do so under current economic climate e.g. we have permission to open a Sixth Form due to overwhelming pupil and parent demand. We have attempted to raise the capital required through sponsorship but have been unable to do so.”*

*“Length of school terms - not realistic to do so - right on border with Lincs, Norfolk and Peterborough. Staff have children attending school in different LAs - also other local schools.”*

*“Academy chain follows national terms and conditions so, we are limited by the chain in what is allowed. Changing school terms is too complex for a single school to do, as staff have children in different schools and variability in holidays will not work practically in a small area.”*

## 7. Perceived impact of changes made

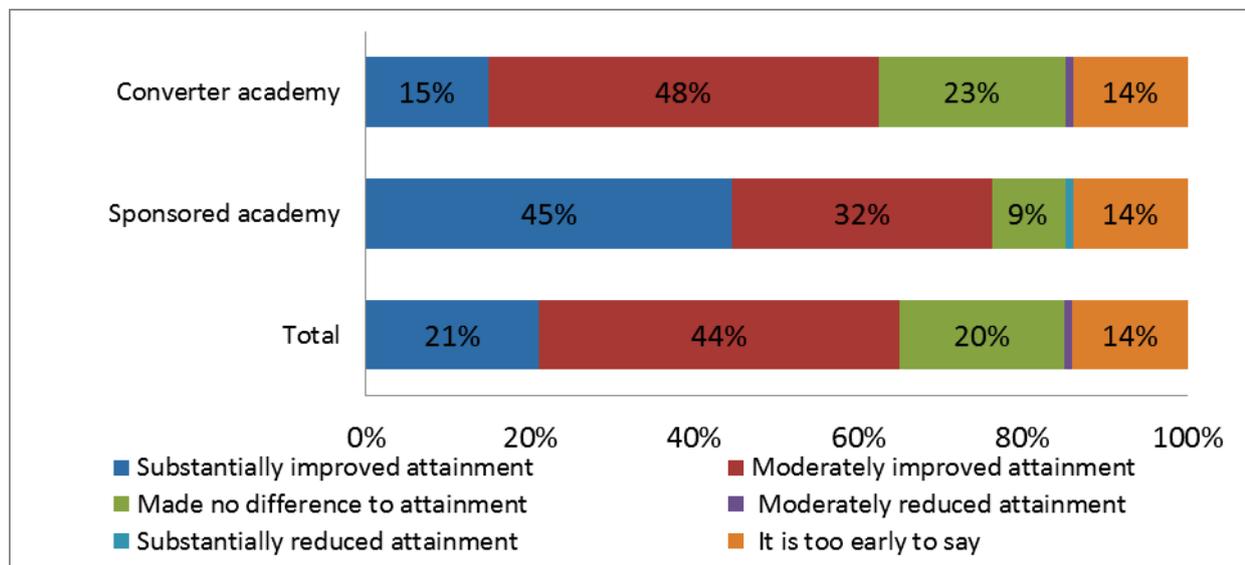
### Key findings

- Two thirds of academies believe the changes they have made have improved attainment. This is especially the case for sponsored academies. The longer an academy has been open, the more likely they are to say the changes have substantially improved attainment.
- Increased collaboration, changes to the curriculum and school leadership were felt to have led to the biggest improvements in academies. Changes in leadership were seen as important especially in sponsored academies.

All academies which had made changes since converting (706 out of 720) were asked whether the changes had made a difference. As shown in Figure 9, almost half (45 per cent) of sponsored academies felt that the changes had substantially improved attainment, with just under a third (32 per cent) believing they had moderately improved attainment – so overall over three quarters said they have improved attainment. Changes made by converter academies were somewhat less likely to be seen as having

so much impact. Just under two thirds felt that changes made had improved attainment (15 per cent reported a substantial impact and 48 per cent moderate effect). Given that sponsored academies generally start with weaker schools and have made more changes, this is as would be expected.

**Figure 9: Perceived impact on attainment of changes made in sponsored and converter academies**



Base: Sponsored academies 143 and Converter academies 563

Figure 10 shows that the longer an academy has been open; the more likely they are to say the changes made are making a difference. It is interesting to note that since May 2010 there is little difference in the proportion of academies by year of conversion who say the results have made no difference or only moderately improved performance. Those who received academy status more recently are likely to say it is too early to say and less likely to say substantially improved attainment.

**Figure 10: Perceived impact on attainment of changes made by year of academy status**

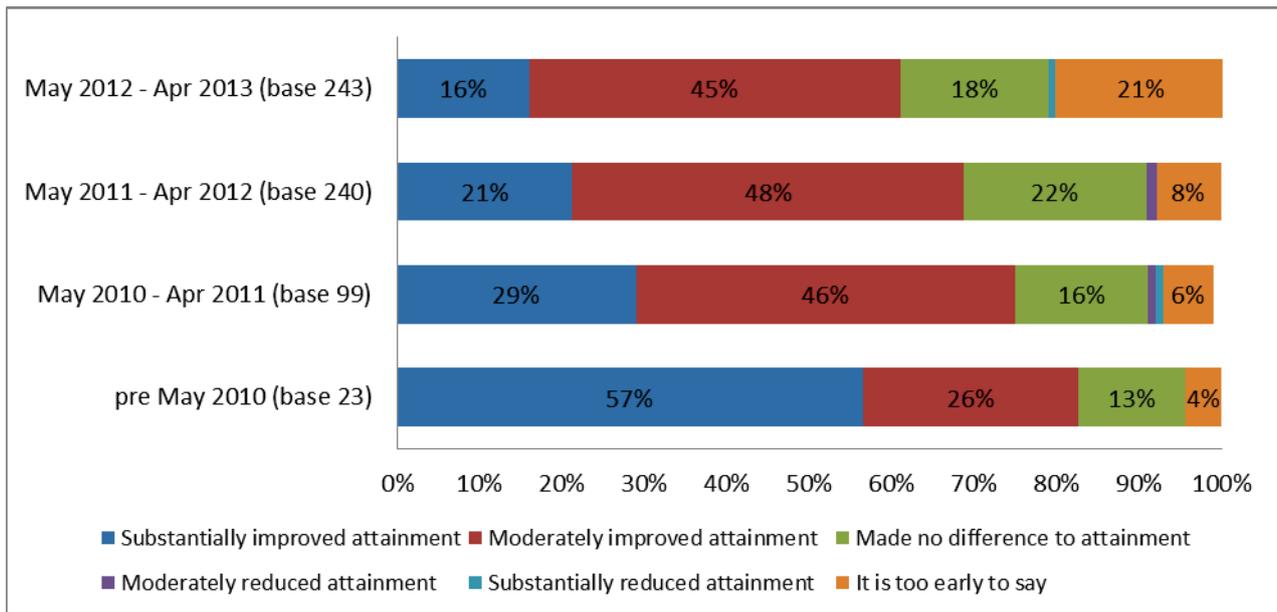
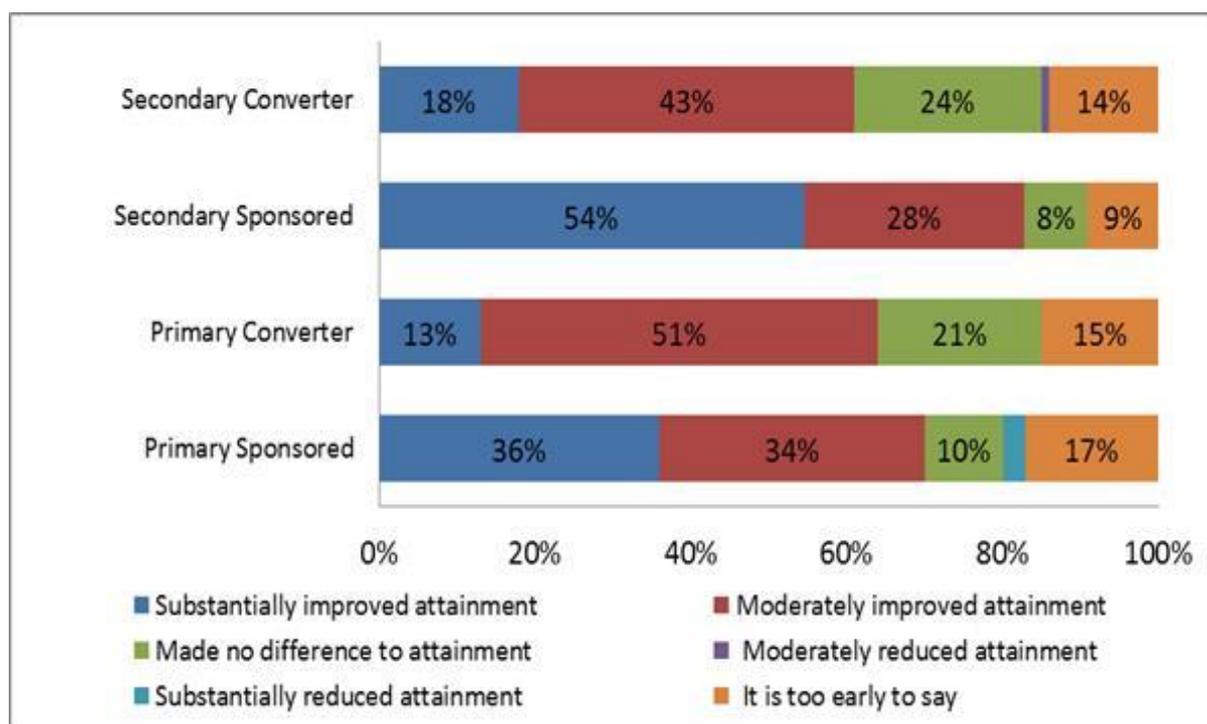


Figure 11 shows that the data for secondary sponsored academies are even more positive than primary sponsored. Over half (54 per cent) believe that changes have substantially improved attainment while a further 28 per cent reported moderate improvements. So, overall 82 per cent believe the changes made have improved attainment. The overall figure for primary academies is 70 per cent. It is worth noting that there is not a significant difference between the figures for secondary converter academies and primary.

**Figure 11: Perceived impact of changes made by phase and type**



### Which changes are making the difference?

Table 4 shows the following proportions: academies making each change; those who have made the change and believe it has improved attainment; and the proportion who have made a change and believe it is the most important change they have made.

Three of the four most commonly made changes are linked to saving/having control over money but the academies who have made these changes do not necessarily link them to improved attainment (although it is possible that many changes were helped by more funding for frontline education). The changes made which academies are most likely to link to improved performance fundamentally change how the school functions i.e. collaborating with schools in more formal partnerships (45 per cent), changing the curriculum (57 per cent), changing school leadership (55 per cent) and although not many have increased the length of the school day, of those that have a large proportion regard it as important (54 per cent).

The two changes most likely to be endorsed as the most important are changing the curriculum (endorsed by 29 per cent of those who made the change) and changing the school leadership (31 per cent).

**Table 4: The perceived impact of different changes**

	% of academies making the change	% of those making the change linking it to improved attainment	% of those making the change who think it is the most important change they have made
Procured services that were previously provided by the LA	87%	20%	6%
Collaborated with other schools in more formalised partnerships	60%	45%	15%
Changed your pattern of capital expenditure	59%	21%	3%
Introduced savings in back-office functions	58%	14%	0%
Reconstituted your governing body	58%	16%	1%
Changed the performance management system for teachers	56%	36%	7%
Changed the curriculum you offer	55%	57%	29%
Added non-teaching positions	48%	35%	8%
Changed school leadership	47%	55%	31%
Introduced or increased revenue-generating activities	35%	20%	4%
Increased the number of pupils on roll	33%	11%	1%
Changed staff pay structures	24%	13%	2%
Changed your admission criteria	22%	8%	1%
Hired teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS)	16%	15%	3%
Sought to attract pupils from a different geographical area	10%	9%	1%
Increased the length of the school day	8%	54%	11%
Changed the length of school terms	4%	16%	3%
Reduced the number of pupils on roll	2%	17%	8%

Table 5 demonstrates that there was some variation between the changes perceived to be making a difference in sponsored academies compared to converters. For sponsored academies, two factors dominate endorsement as the most important change made; namely changing school leadership (56 per cent of sponsored academies who made the change) and changing the curriculum (26 per cent of sponsored academies who made the change).

For converter academies there were not such clearly dominant changes. Only two of the changes listed were not endorsed as the most important change for converters compared to ten for sponsored academies. Although only a small proportion of converter academies have changed the length of the school day, this was the most important change for a fifth of those who had made it.

**Table 5: The difference in perceived impact of changes between academy types**

	% of sponsored academies making the change	% of converter academies making the change	% of sponsored making the change linking it to improved attainment	% of converter making the change linking it to improved attainment	% of sponsored making the change who think it is the most important change	% of converter making the change who think it is the most important change
Procured services that were previously provided by the LA	83	88	17	21	5	6
Changed your pattern of capital expenditure	54	60	19	22	1	4
Introduced savings in back-office functions	55	59	12	14	0	1
Collaborated with other schools in more formalised partnerships	68	58	45	45	8	17
Reconstituted your governing body	76	54	26	12	0	1
Changed the curriculum you offer	61	53	77	50	26	30
Changed the performance management system for teachers	70	52	39	35	3	9
Added non-teaching positions	50	47	31	36	3	10
Changed school leadership	72	40	73	46	56	20
Introduced or increased revenue-generating activities	34	35	8	23	0	5
Increased the number of pupils on roll	41	30	12	11	0	2
Changed staff pay structures	24	24	9	14	0	3
Changed your admission criteria	20	22	7	9	0	2
Hired teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS)	24	14	14	15	0	4
Sought to attract pupils from a different geographical area	12	9	11	8	0	0
Increased the length of the school day	18	5	63	45	0	21
Changed the length of school terms	6	4	22	13	0	0
Reduced the number of pupils on roll	3	1	0	25	0	13

## 8. The use of unqualified teachers

### Key finding

- 16 per cent of academies have hired unqualified teachers but only five per cent of academies have any unqualified teachers who are not working towards QTS.
- Those open as academies longer are more likely to have hired a non QTS teacher.

One of the changes academies can make is to hire unqualified teachers. Table 6 shows that 16 per cent of all academies have used this freedom (24 per cent of sponsored and 14 per cent of converters). Secondary schools were more likely than primary (23 per cent compared 8 per cent) to have used unqualified teachers.

**Table 6: The proportion of academies who have hired unqualified teachers**

	Total	Sponsor	Converter	Primary	Secondary
Hired teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS)	16%	24%	14%	8%	23%
Base	720	148	572	334	360

Table 7 shows that those schools which achieved academy status first are more likely to hire unqualified teachers.

**Table 7: The proportion of academies who have hired unqualified teachers by opening date**

	Total (of those who agreed to data matching)	Pre May 2010	May 2010 - Apr 2011	May 2011 - Apr 2012	May 2012 - Apr 2013
Hired teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS)	17%	48%	28%	16%	11%
Base	613	23	100	240	250

The 16 per cent (116) of academies which have hired an unqualified teacher since being an academy were asked how many teachers they currently employ without qualified teacher status (QTS). Table 8 shows that seven per cent of those who have at some point hired a non-QTS teacher do not currently have any, while 32 per cent only have one; and 23 per cent have two – so overall 62 per cent of academies who have hired a non-QTS teacher currently have two or fewer.

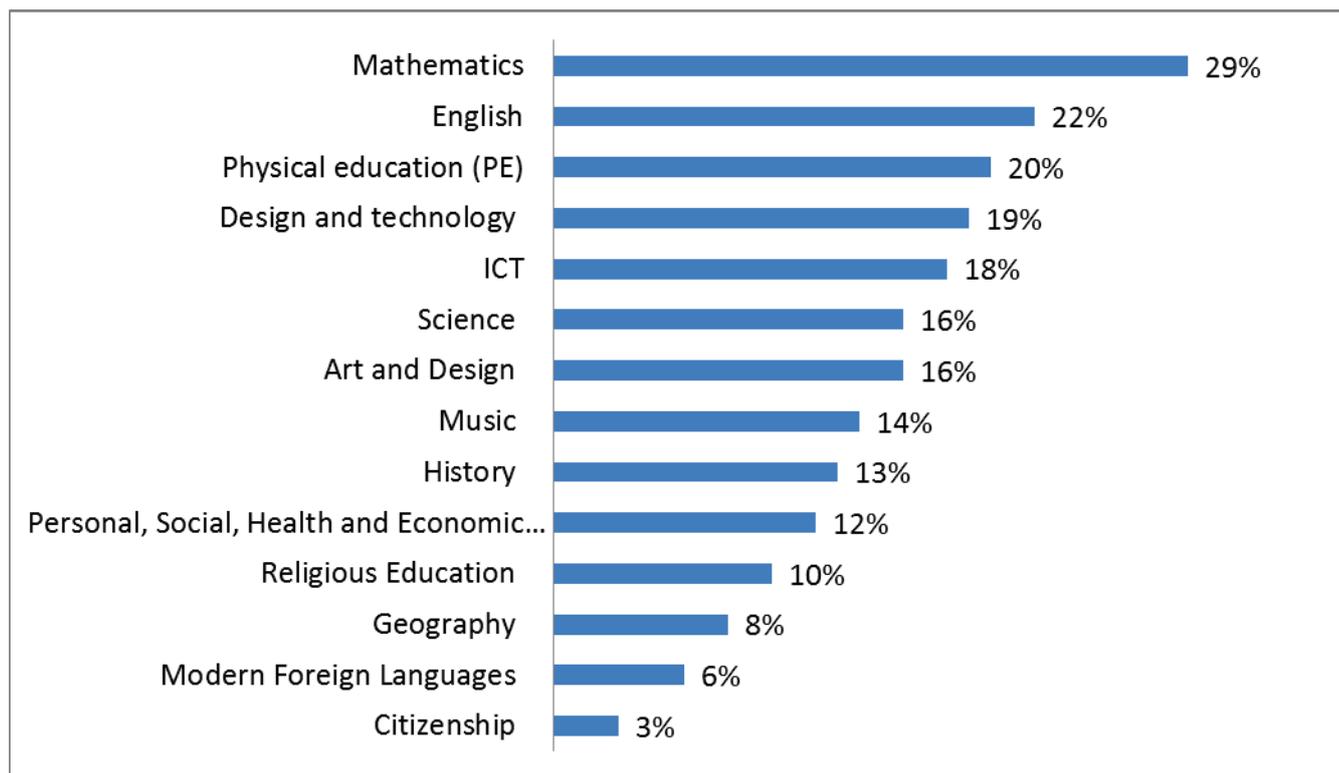
**Table 8: The number of non-QTS teachers currently employed**

Number of non-QTS teachers	Proportion of those using freedom
0	7%
1	32%
2	23%
3	18%
4	8%
5	5%
6	4%
7	1%
10	2%
22	1%
Base	116

Only 35 academies say they have unqualified teachers of whom none are working towards QTS (5% of the total sample).

Academies who had hired non-QTS teachers were asked which subjects they taught. As Figure 12 shows, these included both core and non-core subjects.

**Figure 12: Subjects taught by unqualified teachers**



## 9. Use of the new curricula and changes to the subjects offered

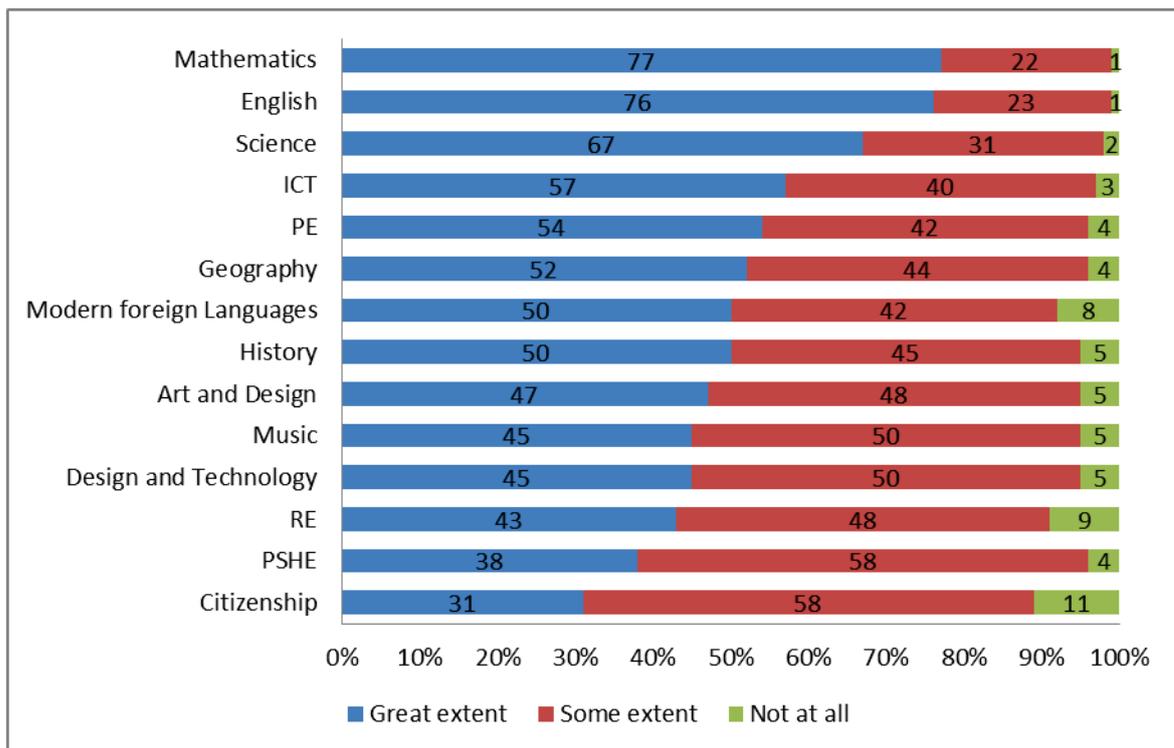
### Key finding

- Mathematics (77 per cent), English (76 per cent) and Science (67 per cent) are the new curricula most likely to be used in September. Secondary academies are more likely than primary to follow the national curriculum for the majority of subjects which suggests innovation in the primary sector.

All academies were asked to what extent (if at all) they intended to follow the new national curriculum in September 2014, for a number of subjects. As Figure 13 shows, academies are most likely to follow the curriculum closely for mathematics, English and science. Academies are using their freedom to innovate with the curriculum they are offering, but for each subject only a small minority are not following the curriculum at all. Less than half are planning to follow the curriculum for art, music, design and technology, RE, PSHE and citizenship.

There are no differences between the intentions of converter and sponsored academies to follow the national curriculum.

**Figure 13: The extent to which academies are planning to follow the new curriculum**



Base: All academies 720

Table 9 shows the difference between phases in the likelihood of following the national curriculum “to a great extent” and “not at all” for each subject. The only subject (highlighted yellow) where primary academies are significantly more likely to follow the curriculum is ICT. For the majority of subjects secondary academies are more likely (highlighted green) to follow the curriculum. It is rarely the case that these differences are caused by primary schools not offering the subjects. This suggests that innovation within primary schools is relatively high. It should be noted that primary academies are more likely to endorse “not at all” for those subjects in blue. The only subjects where there are no significant differences are Mathematics, English, PSHE and Citizenship.

**Table 9: Difference by phase in the proportion of academies planning to follow the curriculum to a great extent and not at all**

	Great Extent		Not at all	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Mathematics	81%	78%	1%	1%
English	79%	77%	1%	1%
ICT	65%	53%	1%	4%
Science	62%	75%	2%	1%
PE	51%	59%	4%	2%
Geography	39%	66%	7%	1%
RE	38%	48%	13%	5%
Modern foreign Languages	38%	64%	12%	1%
PSHE	38%	39%	6%	3%
History	37%	65%	8%	1%
Art and Design	36%	60%	6%	3%
Music	35%	56%	7%	3%
Design and Technology	34%	56%	7%	2%
Citizenship	29%	35%	11%	11%

Base: primary academies 334 and secondary academies 360

### Introduction of new subjects

All respondents were asked if they had introduced new subjects since becoming an academy; 22 per cent claimed to have done so. There was a significant difference between primary and secondary phases – 13 per cent primary compared to 30 per cent for secondary.

Table 10 shows that within the secondary phase there was a significant difference between sponsor and converter academies; however, within the primary phase there was not.

**Table 10: Introduction of new subjects by academy type and phase**

Primary sponsored (70)	Primary converter (258)	Secondary sponsored (74)	Secondary converter (281)
13%	12%	47%	26%
↓ No difference		↓ Significant difference	

As would be expected given previous findings which showed that those academies who converted shortly after May 2010 have made more changes; the proportion who have introduced new subjects is higher for this group. Of the pre 2010 sponsored academies (only 23 in the matched sample) 57 per cent have introduced new subjects, May 2010-

April 2011 27 per cent, May 2011-April 2012 23 per cent and for May 2012-April 2013 16 per cent.

The most popular new subjects were Computer Science, Psychology, Engineering and Photography. Science was more likely to be added in sponsored academies. This does not mean that these subjects are more likely to be taught in these schools; rather they are now doing them when they did not do so previously.

**Table 11: New subjects offered by academy type**

	Total Secondary	Secondary academy type	
		Sponsored	Converter
Computing/Computer Science	28%	23%	31%
Psychology	16%	14%	17%
Photography	10%	11%	10%
Engineering	10%	14%	8%
Economics	9%	9%	10%
Mathematics (incl. additional/advanced)	9%	17%	6%
Philosophy and Ethics	8%	11%	7%
Law	8%	9%	8%
Drama/Drama & Theatre Studies	7%	9%	6%
Business Studies	7%	14%	4%
Chinese/Mandarin	7%	9%	6%
Science	7%	17%	1%
Spanish	6%	6%	6%
Base	107	35	72

A total of 41 primary academies have introduced new subjects. The two most popular subjects to be introduced (by four academies) were Drama and Spanish, a further three introduced science, cookery, citizenship and music.

## 10. Change in first choice applications

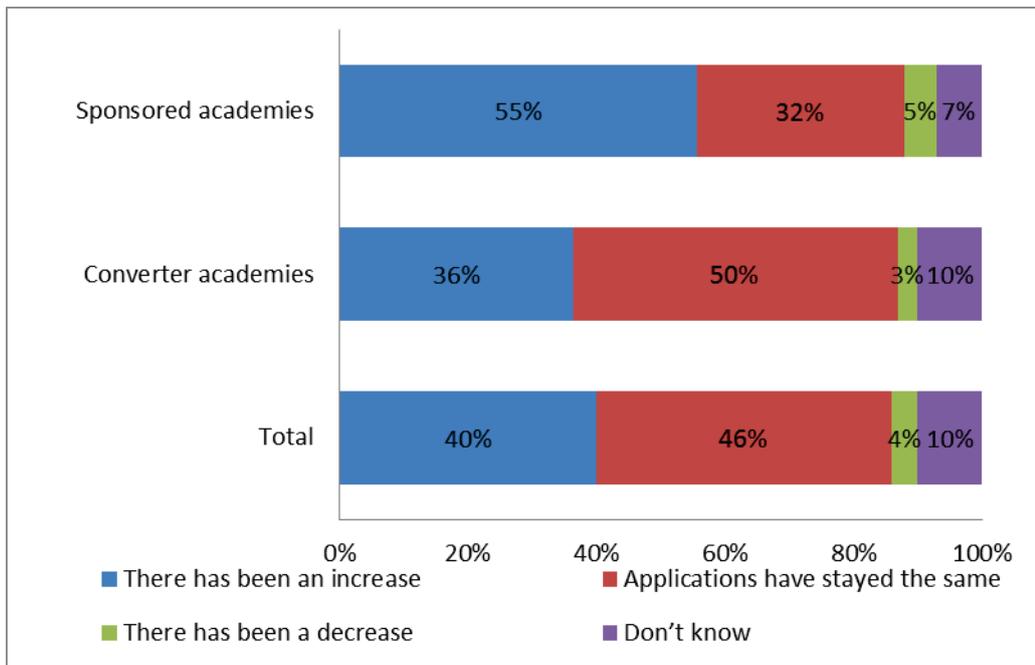
### Key finding

- Over half of sponsored academies (66 per cent of secondary sponsored) and a third of converters reported an increase in first choice applications.
- The longer an academy is open, the more likely they were to say they had experienced an increase in first choice applications

All academies were asked whether since becoming an academy they had experienced a change in the number of first choice applications for their school. Forty per cent of academies had seen an increase (although given demographic changes we would

expect some of this increase). Given improvements in low performing schools becoming a sponsored academy, it is unsurprising to see Figure 14 show a greater proportion of these experiencing an increase in first choice applications compared to already higher performing converter academies (55 per cent compared to 36 per cent).

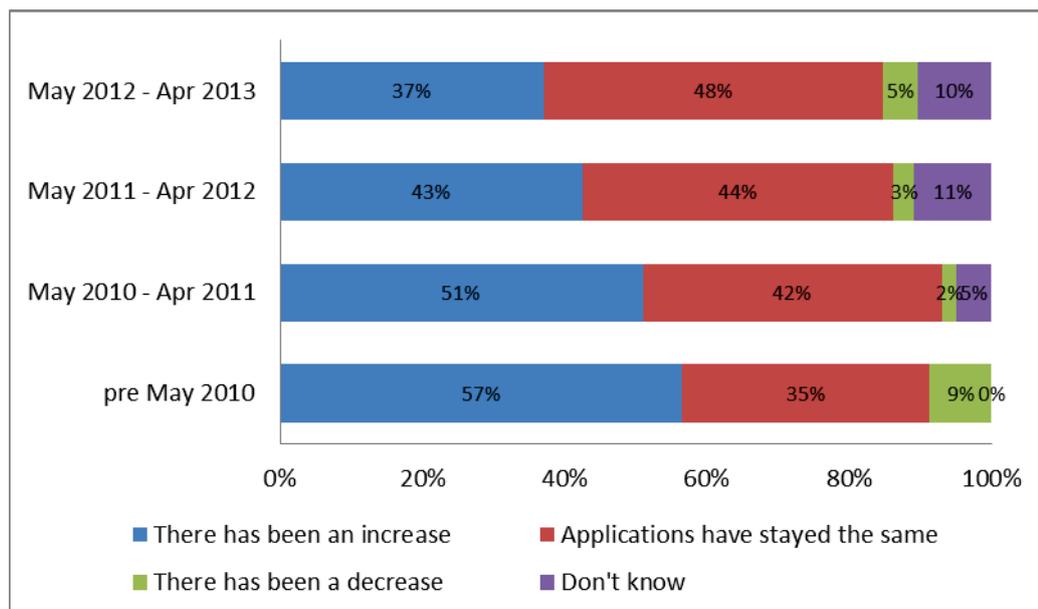
**Figure 14: Change in first choice applications by academy type**



Base: Sponsored academies 148 and Converter academies 572

Figure 15 shows that the longer an academy is open, the more likely they were to say that they had experienced an increase in first choice applications. This suggests that the views of parents do not change immediately but over time the academies are more likely to experience increased demand.

**Figure 15: Change in first choice applications by date of becoming an academy**



Base: Pre May 2010 23, May 2010- Apr 2011 100 , May 2011- Apr 2012 240, May 2012- Apr 2013 250

## 11. Attitudes to borrowing

### Key finding

- Views are evenly divided - a third of academies would like to be able to borrow funds, a third would not, and a third are unsure. Secondary academies are more interested in borrowing.
- Schools who became academies shortly after May 2010 were more likely to be interested in borrowing funds.

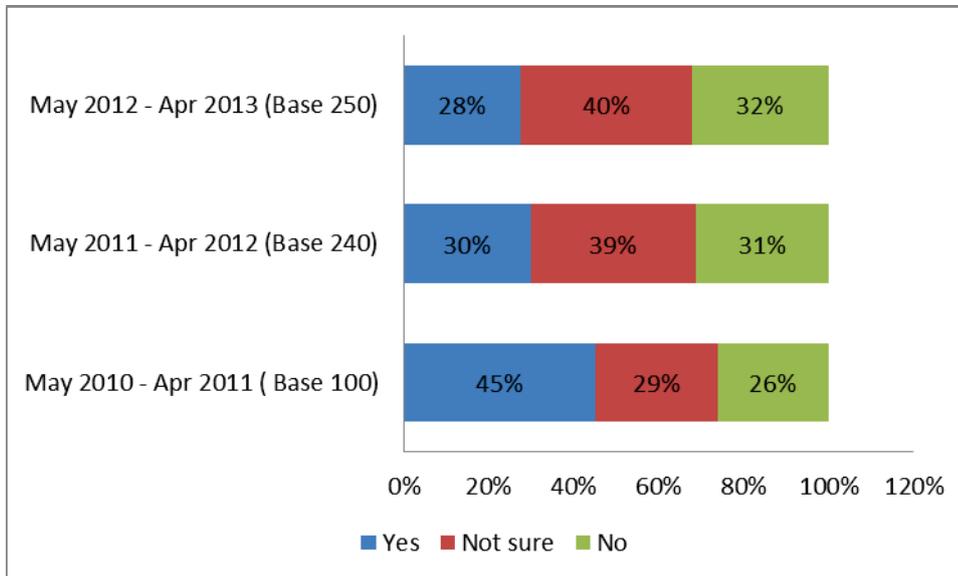
All academies were asked whether, if allowed, they would want to borrow money which would be repaid using their annual funding. Table 12 shows that academies were split in their response, with roughly a third saying they would be interested, roughly a third who would not, and a third who were not sure. Secondary academies were significantly more likely than primary to say they would want to borrow money (38 per cent compared to 25 per cent). There were no significant differences between converters and sponsored academies or between those who are or are not in a MAT.

**Table 12: Academies desire to borrow**

	Total	Primary	Secondary
Yes	31%	25%	38%
No	32%	34%	29%
Not sure	38%	41%	34%
Base	720	334	360

Figure 16 shows the academies who achieved academy status shortly after May 2010 are more likely to wish to borrow funds. This supports the finding that early converters were likely to make more changes and appear more likely to innovate.

**Figure 16: Academies desire to borrow by date of receiving academy status**



Those academies who were interested in borrowing funds were asked how they would use the borrowed funds. As demonstrated in Table 13, there were no significant differences between primary and secondary schools; although base sizes are low, there were differences between academy types. Half of converter academies claimed they would spend the money on expansion (compared to 34 per cent of sponsored), while sponsored academies were more likely than converters to say they would spend the funds on learning resources (29 per cent compared to 15 per cent) and Other (34 per cent compared to 17 per cent).

**Table 13: Use of borrowed funds**

	Sponsored academies	Converter academies
Expansion	34%	53%
Building maintenance	26%	30%
Other building costs	29%	34%
Learning resources	29%	15%
IT	34%	28%
Other	34%	17%
Base	38*	184

Some of those who answered 'other' provided more detail. Common responses were staffing/teachers and improving sports facilities.

## 12. School to school support

### Key findings

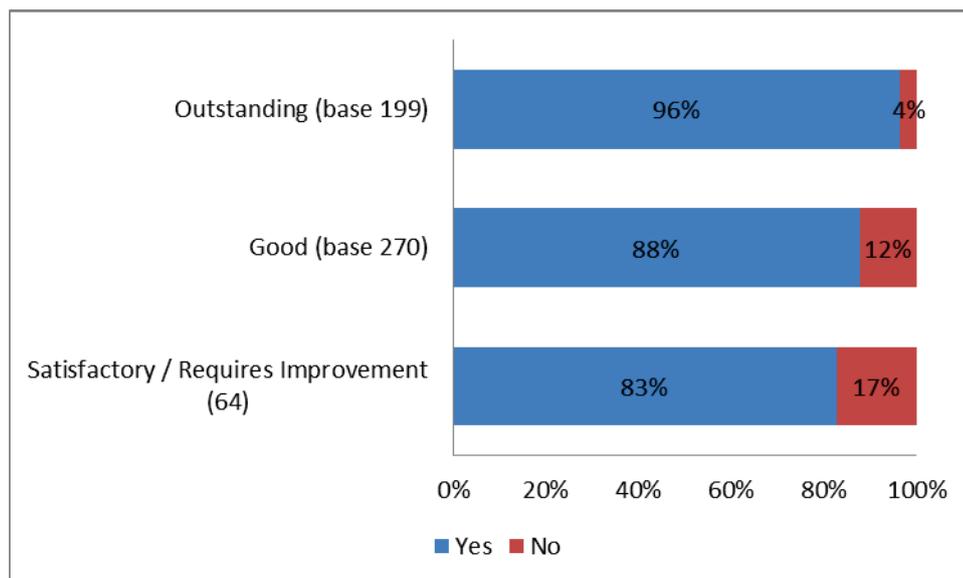
- 87 per cent of academies support other schools (91 per cent of converters and 74 per cent of sponsored). 72 per cent of academies support schools they did not before conversion.
- Almost all academies rated outstanding by Ofsted support other schools (96 per cent).
- Academies often receive support from academies within a trust of which they are not a member, whether they are members of a MAT or not.

### Supporting other schools

A key aim of the education reforms is to increase the level of interaction between schools. Converter academies are expected to provide school-to-school support and there is evidence that this is happening. 87 per cent of academies support other schools with converters more likely than sponsored academies to do so (91 per cent compared to 74 per cent). There was no significant difference in the likelihood of primary and secondary academies providing support to other schools.

Figure 17 shows that although the vast majority of academies support others, those rated outstanding by Ofsted are more likely to do so than those who are not. Only a very small minority of outstanding schools do not claim to support others. Data are not presented for inadequate schools below due to a prohibitively low base (12).

**Figure 17: The proportion of academies supporting others by Ofsted grade**



Those who achieved academy status shortly after May 2010 are marginally more likely (92 per cent) to be supporting other schools than those who became academies between May 2012 and April 2013 (84 per cent).

Academies were asked specifically what support they had provided *since* becoming an academy and 72 per cent said that they were now providing support to schools that they did not before.

Almost three quarters (72 per cent) offer joint practice development (e.g. lesson study). Other support offered includes developing middle leadership (57 per cent), running CPD courses (56 per cent) and boosting senior leadership capacity (44 per cent). Just over a third have deployed an SLE, LLE or NLE (39 per cent) and 38 per cent have seconded teachers or leaders into other schools.

There are some differences between the support offered by type and phase of academy. Converters were more likely to deploy an SLE, LLE or NLE (42 per cent compared to 20 per cent of sponsored) and more likely to review governance (24 per cent compared to 15 per cent of sponsored). Primary schools were more likely to offer joint practice development (77 per cent compared to 70 per cent of secondaries). Secondary schools are more likely to offer a wide range of support (as illustrated in Table 14) especially development of future/middle leadership and deploying an SLE/LLE/NLE.

**Table 14: The type of support offered**

	% of all academies offering support	% of primary academies offering support	% of secondary academies offering support
Joint practice development (e.g. Lesson study)	72%	77%	70%
Developing middle leadership	57%	53%	62%
Externally-run CPD courses	56%	51%	58%
Boosting senior leadership capacity	44%	47%	42%
Deployed an SLE / LLE / NLE	39%	34%	43%
Secondment of teachers or leaders into other schools	38%	30%	46%
Action research activities	26%	23%	31%
Developing programmes for future leaders	25%	19%	31%
Other (Please specify)	25%	22%	26%
Review of governance	22%	22%	22%

Those who said they had provided ‘other’ support were asked to specify the type of support they provided. Some specific comments from academies included:

*“I have supported several schools, who have been interested in becoming stand-alone academies. I have undertaken face-to-face meetings with Head teachers, governors and senior leaders in schools to guide their applications.”*

*“Curriculum development and mentoring has always been a key component of our support for other schools, locally, nationally and internationally.”*

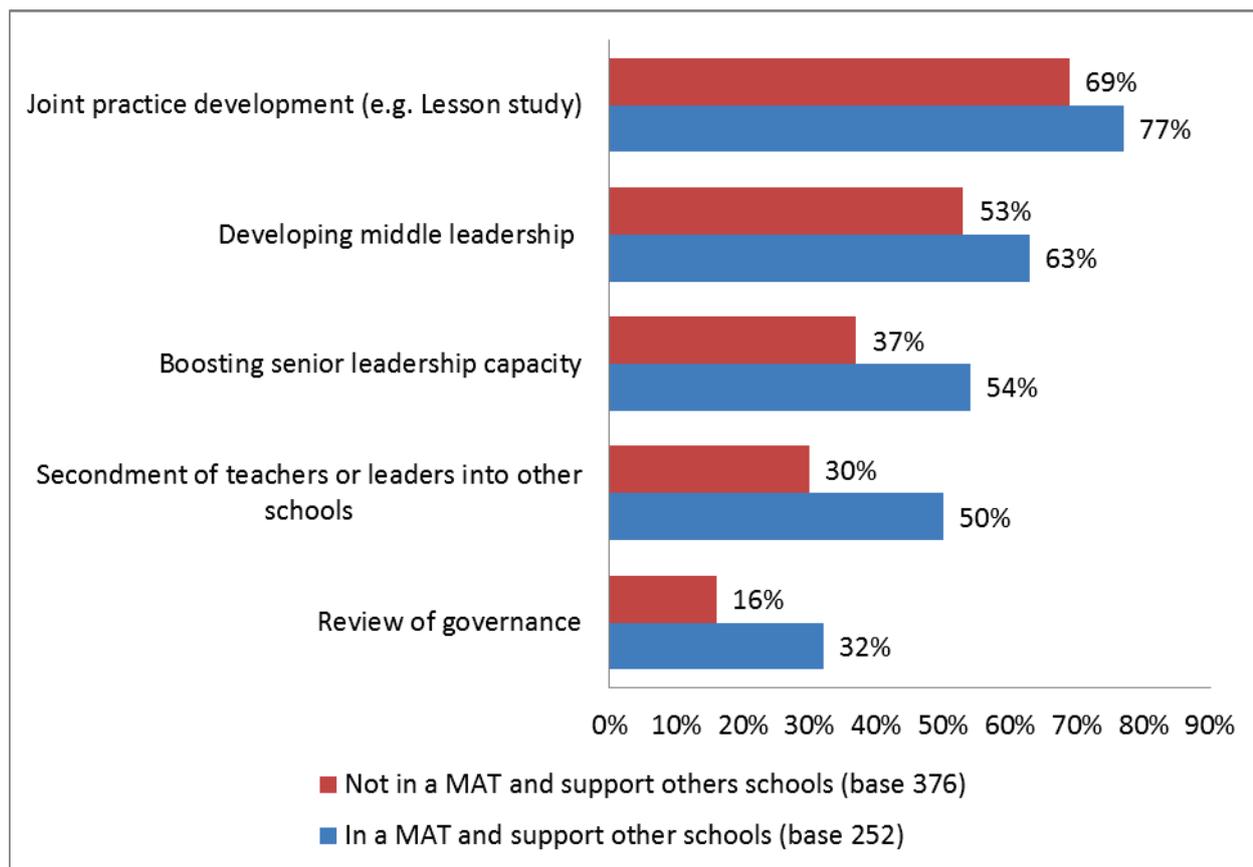
*“Providing outreach and inreach to mainstream SEN pupils. We are now considering developing a business model for this.”*

*“Specialist behaviour support, Literacy, EYFS, SENCO & Performing Arts teachers brokered out to other primary schools and secondary academies.”*

## **The importance of multi-academy trusts**

One of the reasons academies join MATs is to formalise the support they give and receive. As would be expected, those in MATs are more likely to offer a wider range of support to other schools. As shown by Figure 18, this is particularly apparent with regards to developing leaders and improving governance.

**Figure 18: Types of support provided by those in a MAT**



### Receiving support from other academies

More than half (57 per cent) of respondents had received support from other academies. As would be expected, sponsored academies are more likely to have received support than converters (72 per cent compared to 52 per cent).

Those receiving support were asked from where it came. It is interesting to note that although 60 per cent of academies in a MAT receiving support do so from others in their MAT, over a fifth (22%) received support from academies from a different trust to their own. Half of those in a MAT which were receiving support had done so from other partner academies. This suggests that MATs are not working in isolation from the rest of the local school system, and are actively working together to lead school improvement. This finding is supported by the fact that of those who are not in MATs, 41 per cent of those receiving support do so from academies who are in a MAT.

### 13. Monitoring teachers' pay and performance

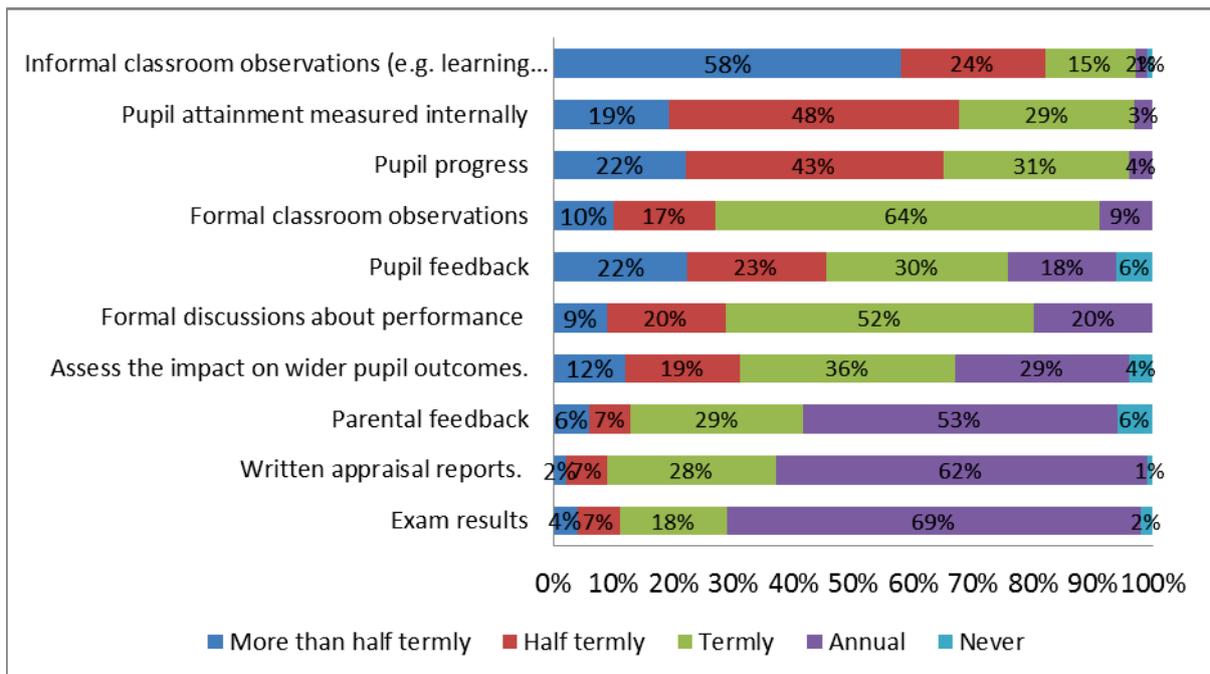
**Key finding**

- Over half of academies have changed how they monitor teacher performance – this is most common in sponsored and secondary academies.
- Around two thirds of academies monitor pupils' attainment and progress at least half-termly. Almost 90 per cent of sponsored academies do so.
- 84 per cent of academies explicitly link pay to performance.

#### How do academies monitor teachers' performance?

All academies were asked how frequently they used different approaches to monitor teacher performance. By far the most frequent approach used was informal classroom observations – 58 per cent do this more than half termly and a further 24 per cent half termly. Formal classroom observations take place at least termly in 91 per cent of academies (27 per cent at least half termly). Measures of pupil attainment and progress are used at least half termly by two thirds of academies.

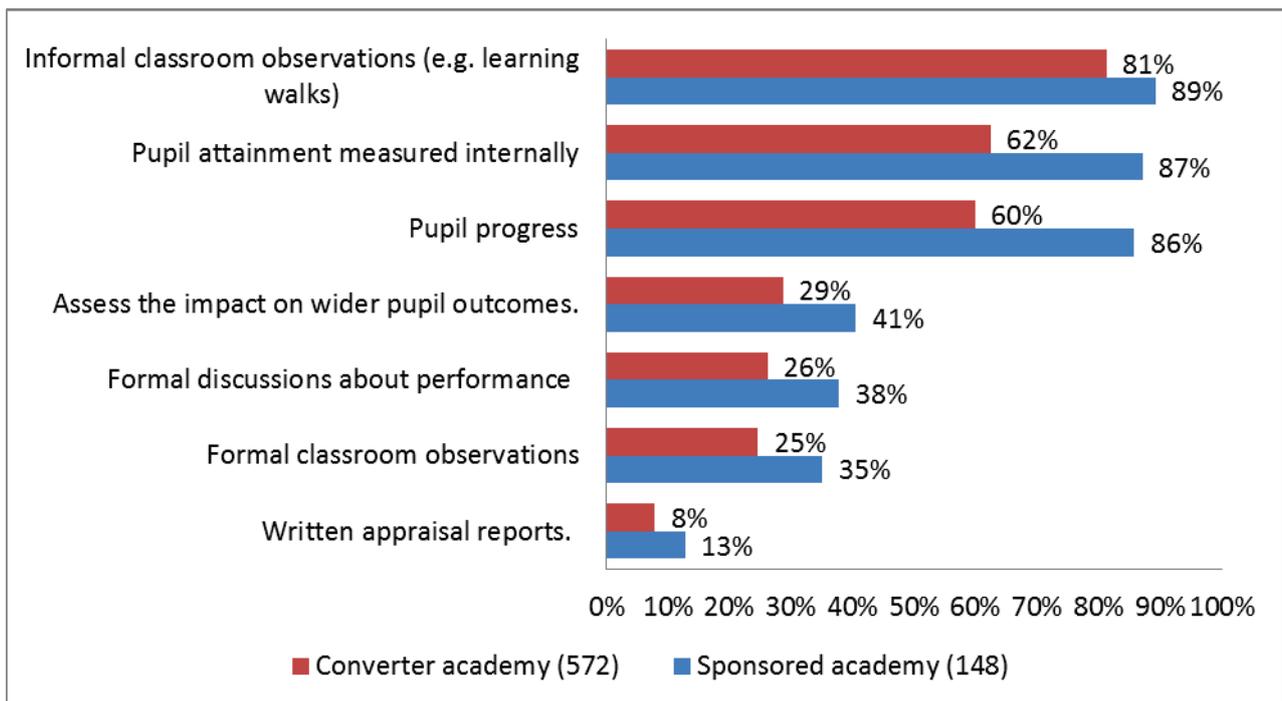
**Figure 19: Methods used to monitor staff performance**



Base: All academies 720

The frequency of monitoring staff performance is significantly higher in sponsored academies than converters, for a number of different approaches. Figure 20 shows where there are significant differences in the proportion of academies using each approach at least half termly. The data show that sponsored academies use measures of pupil attainment and progress data more frequently.

**Figure 20: Methods used to monitor staff performance – sponsor vs converter (use approach at least half termly)**



There are some differences between how primary and secondary academies monitor performance. These are presented in Table 15.

**Table 15: Performance monitoring in primary and secondary academies**

More regular in Primary academies	More regular in Secondary academies	No significant difference
Formal discussions about performance – 86% of primary do this more frequently than annually compared to 75% in secondary	Informal classroom observations – 64% of secondary have these more than half termly compared to 54% in primary	Formal classroom observations
Written appraisal reports – 46% have termly or more regularly in primary compared to 30% in secondary	Pupil attainment measured internally – 23% of secondary more than half termly compared to 15% primary (although figures similar for at least half termly overall)	Pupil feedback
	Pupil progress – 26% of secondary more than half termly compared to 18% in primary (although figures similar for at least half termly overall)	Assess the impact of wider pupil outcomes
		Parental feedback

Academies were asked to provide more detail about how they monitor teacher performance and some made the point that what they do is more than just monitoring performance but also about development/coaching.

*“We use work scrutiny on learning walks and formal observation to assess performance (student progress) over time. We have a system of learning walks, where senior leaders take teachers who need to improve out on learning walks to look at specific areas of outstanding practice. We use one-to-one coaching for teachers, who get 2 RI judgements in formal observations in a year.”*

*“Cyclical and ongoing, using a variety of formal and informal means. We use coaching model, self, peer, line manager review & support. Gather evidence to support evaluation made from range of sources including outcome data, internal assessment, formal and*

*informal observations, work scrutiny, contributions to the wider curriculum, role as personal tutor etc.”*

*“It is not about monitoring. It is what you do about improvement. Measuring just gives you the one piece of crucial data, then the key is what do you do about it. We have a system of coaching and mentoring. This runs throughout the year which all staff partake in and which drives the constant quest for improvement, no matter how good something may already be.”*

## Changes in how academies monitor teacher performance

All academies were asked whether their approaches to monitoring teacher performance had changed since becoming an academy<sup>1</sup>. Overall 53 per cent of academies have changed their approach to monitoring teacher performance. Table 16 shows that sponsored academies are more likely than converters to have changed, as are secondary schools compared to primary schools.

**Table 16: Proportion of academies changing how they monitor teacher performance**

	All academies	Sponsored	Converter	Primary	Secondary
Yes	53%	64%	51%	46%	61%

Although secondary academies are more likely to have changed monitoring arrangements than primary; Table 17 shows there is a much larger disparity between the changes made between the types of academy in secondary compared to primary. 80 per cent of sponsored secondary academies have changed, compared to 56 per cent of converters. For primary the difference is much smaller – 49 per cent compared to 45 per cent.

**Table 17: Proportion of academies changing how they monitor teacher performance by phase and type**

	Primary sponsored	Primary converter	Secondary sponsored	Secondary converter
Yes	49%	45%	80%	56%

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<sup>1</sup> The academies in this research all converted before new regulations that LA maintained schools were required to have changed their performance management systems by September 2013 so that pay progression was linked to performance and not length of service.

The academies who had changed how they monitor performance (53 per cent) were asked to explain the changes made. By far the most commonly cited change was that they had been made more rigorous (27 per cent) while a further 10 per cent said they were more frequent. Some examples are provided below.

*“Prior to becoming an academy, there was little rigour in the process with one lesson observation per year and no scrutiny of work, results, progress etc. Teachers were given the date of the observation months in advance and were allowed to choose the lesson and class. No teacher was refused a pay increase and almost every teacher has passed through threshold by the time the transfer took place. The academy introduced half termly observations and strict evidence-based criteria (use of teacher standards, progress and attainment data, 6 lesson observations, book scrutiny, lesson plan scrutiny and formal review meetings). All judgements are now based on student outcomes and if the pupil achievement targets are not met, performance management is not passed and no pay rise results. SLT's targets are the academy targets and each member of the department has the department achievement target. Collective responsibility for all children.”*

*“I believe that we have got sharper: making explicit links, attainment/progress review cycle - Perfect Management. Teachers are really at the centre of raising attainment for their class/group. Discussion is focussed on the continual need to raise standards.”*

*“1. More rigorous 2. Involving all SLT and subject leaders 3. Built a clear and string T&L team all of whom are outstanding professionals. 4. Developed a clear and robust appraisal system 5. Developed a very strong coaching and mentoring programme.”*

## Changes in how academies manage poor teacher performance

All academies were asked if they had introduced new methods to specifically manage poor performance. As illustrated by Table 18, sponsored academies were more likely to have changed their approach than converters, and secondary schools more than primary.

**Table 18: Proportion of academies changing how they manage poor performance of staff**

	All academies	Sponsored	Converter	Primary	Secondary
Yes	38%	55%	34%	30%	46%

Although there were no differences between sponsored and primary academies with regards to how they *monitor* teacher performance, Table 19 shows there is a significant

difference in how they *manage* poor performance. Sponsored academies are significantly more likely to have changed how they manage poor performance, for both phases.

**Table 19: Proportion of academies changing how they manage poor performance of staff by phase and type**

	Primary sponsored	Primary converter	Secondary sponsored	Secondary converter
Yes	40%	27%	70%	40%

The academies who had changed how they manage poor teacher performance (38 per cent) were asked to explain the changes made. A number of different areas were discussed including; writing a new capability policy (27 per cent) or performance management system (13 per cent); more coaching (15 per cent) with shorter but high intensive (8 per cent) performance review periods and performance linked pay (7 per cent).

### **Coaching and short review periods**

*“We use four to six week development plans for concerns, any staff who do not improve go to a six to eight week support plans, with staff who still do not improve then going to capability. OFSTED have commented very favourably on the very rapid improvement in teaching which they have seen as a result.”*

*“If inadequate, staff receive eight hours of coaching then move to a second observation by another Deputy or the Head Teacher. If they are found to be inadequate again, then there is another eight hours of coaching with specific targets, then they are observed either by a Deputy or a Head Teacher who has not seen the member of staff. If still inadequate, we move to capability. This process takes less than four weeks as we put in an intensive whole day of training for the coaching. Coaches are assistant Head Teachers who have a dramatically reduced timetable and spend most of their time coaching staff.”*

### **Withholding pay**

*“The first action on poor performance is now the responsibility of one of four designated ‘coaches’. If this fails to secure sustained improvement then ‘capability’ follows. Since becoming an academy, there have also been a couple of occasions when pay progression has been declined as a result of inadequate evidence for further progression (short of capability).”*

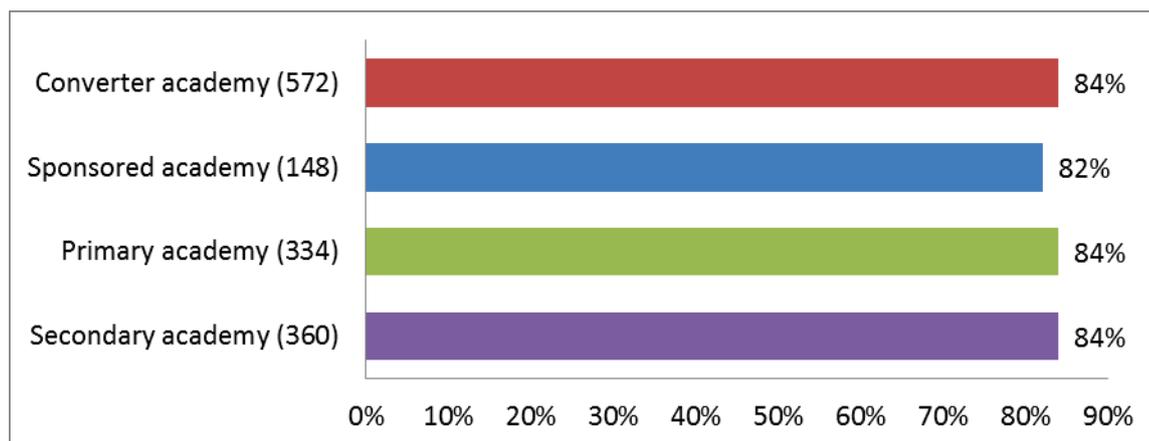
*“As part of the new pay and performance policy, staff are now aware that performance is linked to steps in pay progression and that sustained poor performance is directly linked*

to capability procedures. This is discussed both within performance reviews of teachers, as well as in their pupil progress meetings.”

## Linking pay to performance

All academies were asked if they explicitly link teachers’ pay to performance. Figure 21 shows there were no differences between academy type and phase. Overall 84 per cent of academies do this.

**Figure 21: Is pay linked to performance?**



## 14. Conclusion

This research has provided the Department for Education with a useful understanding of academies’ behaviour. The results show that, on the whole, converters became academies for positive reasons. That is, they wanted to take control of their futures and use their autonomy to raise educational standards. Many academies are now using innovative approaches to education, changing their leadership and working in partnerships with others - and they clearly believe that these changes have improved outcomes for their pupils.

The findings highlight that being an academy is not easy. Some academies articulated in their closing comments that they are held to account more fiercely regarding finance as an academy than they were as a Local Authority school; but it should be noted that very few regret the decision to become an academy.

The findings suggest some characteristics of ‘early converters’ were not as prevalent in those who became academies more recently. Those who became academies shortly after they were first eligible to do so have made wide-ranging changes to the way their schools operate. Those who have converted more recently have made fewer changes and are also not yet planning to make many changes in the future.

Some of the changes which were made by a minority, such as lengthening the school day, were often felt to be the most important change made by academies. The

department will use this research to develop examples of how changes made have led to school improvement and communicate these messages within the system.

The level of support offered by academies to other schools is one of the most prominent findings from the research. The vast majority of converter academies have started to support schools which there were not before conversion. There is evidence of academies in MATs supporting not only the schools in their trust but also standalone schools and even academies in other MATs. Academies are not feeling constrained by geographical boundaries in the way some reported in the survey that they once did, and some are reporting being able to work with like-minded schools from different areas. This collaboration is felt to be helping to improve the education for pupils in the schools and academies involved.

## Concluding comments from academies

All respondents were asked if there was anything else they would like to say about what has changed in their school as a result of becoming an academy. Respondents took this opportunity to provide their view on the academy system as a whole. A number of areas were highlighted including: a general sense of empowerment, opportunities for collaboration and a real sense of autonomy.

Not all of the feedback was positive; some academies felt they were burdened by the intensive demands of financial accountability they experienced compared to when they were LA maintained schools.

### A general sense of empowerment

*“What is interesting is how all staff have really 'bought' in to the idea that we are empowered to make the school work for our children. A palpable sense of ownership. This is an unexpected bonus. Majority of staff .....have relished the freedoms conversion has given us.”*

*“We enjoy the freedoms we have to innovate and develop practice without having to consult or worry about third party opinions, other than those of our key stakeholders”*

*“The culture and climate has become even more clear; we are here for the children, not to please a Local Authority or play their political games. All is clear that we are autonomous within the legal parameters and this is now a locally owned and run school for local families..... For the first time, we now have 100% focus on our children; it is liberating.”*

*“More confidence to innovate. Some things we have done could potentially have been done before, but now that we are more responsible for our own destiny and performance, we are bolder in the changes we make.”*

*“It is wonderful (although it is very hard work). I could never go back to working in a Local Authority school because I would feel stifled by the lack of creativity there. I feel like I can actually get on with my job rather than following the direction set by someone else.”*

*“In retrospect, there is little amongst the many changes we have made which wouldn't have been possible as a community school. However, academy status has changed our mindset and made us think about doing things that we might not have otherwise considered. Our starting point was 'OK, so now we're becoming an academy; how is that going to make things better?’”*

### **Freedom from burdens placed on them by Local Authorities**

*“Yes; the Local Authority did not have the capacity to support us in what we wanted to and needed to achieve. As a Head Teacher, I felt rather isolated, and felt that any visits from the authority were 'finger-pointing' and 'knee jerk' reactions, rather than opportunities to develop strategic solutions to underperformance that would be long lasting and meaningful.”*

*“Our academy has been taken out of Local Authority/political control. We can make our decisions based upon what we think is appropriate; we spend our resources the way we know it's needed. The Local Authority cannot simply access our budget and remove funds when they are ready to do so. We have control over our curriculum and are increasingly confident in how we address the needs of our children. Our suppliers have changed dramatically; we are no longer obliged to use Local Authority contractors or employees. We decide who will do our work; we decide when it will be done and if we don't like it, there is no repeat business. We can bargain and negotiate for better prices; we can sign contracts that benefit us and we make the savings. We can pass on savings immediately to our children by increasing a resource area or offer a higher subsidy on school visits.... The changes have been very positive for us; the level of responsibility to get it right has increased, educationally and financially, but that is only right because we have a responsibility to our children and their parents to do our best.”*

### **Opportunities for collaboration**

*“We have greatly benefited from membership of our local trust. We work in genuine collaboration with other academies within the trust. We take part in regular quality school improvement activities.”*

*“We are aiming to get our first ever 'good' grade when we next have OFSTED. The school has never achieved this grade under the Local Authority. I firmly believe that, without the support of our sponsor and our last OFSTED judgement, we would not be where we are now.”*

*“The support from being a member of our trust and having access to some highly talented staff have been drivers for change. We now have a much clearer notion of how to improve and with greater pace.”*

*“The level of professional support and challenge for staff at all levels has significantly improved as we work with the Executive Head and staff from across all the schools in the MAT.”*

*“The amount of school to school support and leadership support has been superb. We also have more money to spend and target the most appropriate places with less demand for non-essential targets, data and meetings to attend from the Local Authority. We function in a more business like way and have much better services and contracts for cheaper prices.”*

*“It has been like a breath of fresh air working for a national academy chain. It has enabled the staff to feel valued and supported and be thought of as professionals once again.”*

A significant minority highlighted areas where they felt their experience of being an academy was not as positive as hoped. The main point is around how intensive the finance demands on head teachers/school business managers.

Although academies view the intensive financial demands placed on them negatively, it could be argued this demonstrates that academies are being made to provide value for money; and are unable to waste money.

### **Intensive financial demands/bureaucracy**

*“If anything, we are being monitored with far more rigour than before; for example, when we are being audited. Although this is more time consuming, I believe it is positive at the moment.”*

*“I had hoped for less bureaucracy and directives but this has sadly not happened. I am having to spend much more resources on back office functions such as finance and auditing than I had thought I would.”*

*“It is disappointing that the School Forum is a major barrier to ensuring academies are appropriately funded and also that academy audits are so much more burdensome than those for Local Authority maintained schools. The effect of this is that far more senior leadership time, in a small MAT, is spent on these issues.”*

*“At the moment, there is significant weight on senior leaders with regard to financial accountability. It would be helpful for the DfE to be aware that the gains made by having academy freedoms are equally balanced out by financial reporting and process accountability, which, at the moment, are demanding.”*

*“Although we value the freedoms academy status has given us, the back office workloads and stresses have been considerable. There appears to be audit after audit*

*after audit. We understand the reasons, but we weren't made aware at the start of our journey. The role of the accounting officer needs to be reviewed as there appear to be conflicting messages."*



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