



Summary of the Cambridge Academic Partnership Decision making progress on United Learning

Our process began early in 2017, under the previous Chair Anne Campbell, when there was a wide reaching exercise to look at the vision, mission and values of CAP to ensure the best possible educational opportunities for the students in our schools. From that the Board began serious discussions about how to safeguard our vision, including a Board Away Day in February 2018, where the Board discussed the recommendations to MATs from the DfE on strategy and considered educational outcomes, the necessary investment to deliver on the plans and the risks that CAP could face.

Further consideration of strategy took place during 2018, which as many stakeholders will be aware, placed significant emphasis on mission, values and ethos. These were at the heart of the Strategy Day in October and further meetings to consider three specific scenarios:

- a. Remain as we are, and hope that other local schools will seek to join us in future
- b. Look for another local/regional MAT of similar size with which we might merge
- c. Explore which, if any, of the large MATs would be a possible good fit for our cluster of schools

In exploring these scenarios we were very conscious of the distinctive ethos of our schools in Cambridge, our desire to see them develop as a Leading Learning Partnership, and the fact that we have a very highly developed local network that we would not want to see disrupted through too much change.

Last summer Andrew Hutchinson informed us of his decision to retire from his post as CEO at the end of August 2019. When a CEO leaves their post, the Department for Education (DfE) recommends that all MATs conduct a strategic review of the options available to them rather than just automatically appoint a replacement. After discussions with officials from the DfE it was clear that the national trend was for small MATs to seem to grow, either by adding individual schools, merging with other similar size MATs, or joining larger MATs. They also stressed that it was difficult for even small, strong MATs such as ours to put in place the necessary structures to support the schools and deliver effective economies of scale.

We are very happy with the size of our current partnership of four schools, and the way they collaborate so well together to improve the education of young people in Cambridge. Over recent years we have put in place an integrated back office team that works across the schools, and we share teaching staff, examination courses and extra-curricular activities. Our current model works well because it is based in Cambridge and the schools are close to each other - expansion beyond the city would most likely require a change in the way we do things. The capacity for the Trust to grow only within the city, is however very limited indeed, but even so such an option clearly had to remain as our default position.

We considered a merger with a similar sized trust, conscious however that were we to merge with another group, the way we do things would inevitably have to change. There are no other Trusts that operate only in the City of Cambridge like we do, so the result of any merger would have been that would no longer be a cohesive city group of similar sized schools. Instead we would be part of a bigger group covering Cambridgeshire and possibly other neighbouring counties. Looking at the structures of Trusts of this size, we did not feel that even a combined group would be able to offer us the combination of specialist support and local autonomy we were seeking.

Furthermore, if the Trust we chose to merge with already had a CEO, this person would automatically lead the merged Trust, and we would, we felt, have to adopt different approaches to the ones we currently value and we would lose our vision for a Leading Learning Partnership. Looking further ahead, it would be entirely possible that this new merged Trust would then merge again in future, resulting in a regional MAT where our four schools lost their Partnership identity entirely. We felt that it was not in the interest of the schools to enter into what could be significant period of uncertainty and change and so did not choose to pursue this option further.

Our third option was to explore whether there was a national MAT which was of a sufficient size to have a highly developed school improvement team, as well as specialist support services, into which we could slot as a ready made local cluster, retaining our partnership identity. We analysed the range of national Trusts and came up with a shortlist of two which we felt would potentially be a good match in terms of our aspirations and ethos, and could help us to improve our schools further. We then conducted further research into these two MATs, including visits to their schools, before concluding that United Learning was the best national MAT option.

Once we had settled on the two preferred ways forward, staying as we are or joining United Learning, a working party of Board directors and our Chief Finance Officer produced a highly detailed paper comparing these two scenarios. This paper recommended that the Board should seek to join United Learning as a cluster partnership of schools, with a high degree of local autonomy, with effect from 1st September 2019. This was then approved by the Board at their meeting on 21st January, along with the decision to recruit an Executive Headteacher for the vacant position at Parkside Community College instead of a Chief Executive. This role, which will be crucial to ensure stability at Parkside and continue the development of Cambridge Academic Partnership within United Learning, will be advertised this month to start in September 2019.

Having listened to comments and views and held further meetings over the last month and reconvened as a Board, we are confident that our proposal is the right way forward for our group of schools. We believe it will enable us to:-

- Provide security and certainty for the schools, their Governing Bodies and Staff, so that at a time of change they can focus on their most important task of improving the education for students.
- Retain all the benefits of our current partnership without diluting these through merger. The CAP brand will continue within United Learning, as will our vision of developing as a leading learning partnership in Cambridge.
- Have a high level of local accountability. Local Governing Bodies will be recruited from parents, staff and the wider community. We will also establish a Partnership Board to ensure that the schools work closely together for the benefit of Cambridge as a whole. We would be very happy to consider how this group can have local democratic membership.

- The land and buildings of the four schools will be protected so cannot be sold off for commercial profit.
- Raise standards in all our schools. In five years time we would hope that all our schools will be among the highest achieving in the country, with Ofsted considering them to be outstanding.
- Ensure that as high a percentage as possible of the money the schools receive from central government is spent directly on the young people we educate, so that we can recruit the very best teachers, offer a wide and exciting curriculum, and provide a right extra curricular offer, including areas such as arts and sports.