



CAP & UL Frequently Asked Questions raised during the consultation period

Who are United Learning?

United Learning is a group of schools which aims to provide excellent education to children and young people across the country. Its schools seek to improve the life chances of all the children and young people they serve and have a mission to bring out 'the best in everyone' – students, staff, parents and the wider community. Uniquely, the Group includes significant numbers of schools in both the public and the private sectors, working together for mutual benefit.

United Learning provides a broad education, which prepares young people to progress in learning and to make a success of their lives. Its schools focus sharply on the evidence of what makes it more likely that young people will progress and succeed, apply that to their practice and continue to learn and develop our schools. The Group makes it a priority to provide teachers with excellent professional support and development, so that every child receives an excellent experience.

Through being a group, United Learning can offer more to both staff and young people than any single school or small MAT could offer alone. The growing range of outstanding group-wide activities that they can provide will mean that more young people will have truly exceptional and inspiring experiences. Already, they believe that their Group contains the most developed relationships and practical interaction between independent and state schools in the country, creating benefits for all the schools involved.

From Cumbria to Kent, United Learning has inclusive and welcoming schools, welcoming children of all backgrounds, all faiths and all abilities.

Why are CAP planning to join United Learning?

In summary we believe joining United Learning will offer us the following key benefits:-

It will help us maintain excellence and further improve the quality of education in our schools. Schools succeed when they are part of a strong network. Headteachers, senior leaders and teachers across United Learning learn from each other through visiting each others' schools and sharing best practice.

As part of United Learning our staff will have access to specialist subject advisors to assist them in developing their expertise. This will give them a network of support, advice and challenge that would not be possible otherwise, as well as opportunities for career development.

Our students will benefit from the opportunities that only a national group such as United Learning can offer across its schools. These opportunities range from academic initiatives to joint arts, sport and cultural programmes that bring students together from across the country - from both academies and independent schools - to participate and collaborate.

It will help us continue to recruit and retain high quality staff at a time of increasing teacher shortage. United Learning have a flourishing teacher training programme, for which we would develop a Cambridge hub, building on our already successful offer. Our staff will have access to United Learning's high quality development programmes, giving them the support and opportunity to progress their careers. Staff will continue to enjoy the benefits of being part of a strong local partnership, enhanced by being part of a larger group.

It will enable us to realise our ambition of being a Leading Learning Partnership. As part of a larger group we expect to be able to achieve economies of scale, enabling us to direct a greater proportion of our resources to classroom activity. We will also, with the backing of United Learning's capacity, be in a better position to develop our offer locally than we would if we remained a standalone trust. United Learning has committed to retaining local and partnership governance.

Won't our schools get lost in a much bigger organisation?

No, because of the way in which United Learning is organised. Its local cluster model and regional directors allow every school to be known well and to have the autonomy to run themselves in ways that make sense in their local context, while having the opportunity to learn from others in very different contexts.

Each of our schools will retain its own identity and be run very much along the lines of how they operate now. United Learning has committed to retaining our local partnership model, recognising the strength it brings.

Don't these big national trusts have a bad reputation?

Some have had problems which have featured in the media, but there have also been similar stories about small and medium sized MATs too, as well as in schools run by local authorities. United Learning has a strong reputation, which we have checked out as part of our due diligence, and is rated highly by the DfE.

How can you be sure United Learning won't asset strip our schools/seek to merge them?

Every academy group has a funding agreement with the Department for Education. The school land and buildings are held on trust, for the sole purpose of providing education, with clear restrictions regarding circumstances such as development of school land.

CAP Directors sought and received an unambiguous commitment from United Learning that any future development gain from the current schools would be retained by the partnership for reinvestment back into the schools.

How can you be sure that our schools will still be accountable to their local communities?

Strong local governance is a key feature of the way United Learning runs its schools. A local governing body within United Learning has a good range of skills, and aims to include both elected parents and staff, as well as volunteers from the local community.

The local governance that we already enjoy in our four schools and at the level of the partnership board will continue as part of United Learning.

Will our schools lose their identity?

Not at all. All United Learning schools retain a local head and governing body which includes elected parents and staff. There is no attempt to give a centralised corporate brand to its schools. In our research we found that the schools were both proud of their local identity and to be part of United Learning.

We anticipate retaining the CAP branding within United Learning, as the partnership will continue as a distinct operational model.

Who will be the replacement for Andrew Hutchinson?

We will not be appointing a direct replacement for Andrew: as part of United Learning our local partnership will no longer require a role at this level. Jon Coles, as CEO of United Learning, will be the accounting officer for our schools, supported by his Executive Team. The new Executive Headteacher, who will be based at Parkside, will take on responsibility for coordinating the work of our partnership.

Will staff lose out as a result of this change, and so leave the our schools?

No, staff will transfer to the new group with pay, conditions of service and pensions all protected. We also consider that the much wider range of professional development opportunities available to staff will encourage them to stay in our schools, and this was a significant reason for our decision to join United Learning.

How has this significant change been decided on?

As we indicated in the letter, we have spent a lot of time exploring the various options open to us, guided by clear criteria. Fundamentally our decision has been based on doing the best for the young people who are currently in our schools and who will join them in the future. We firmly believe that joining United Learning is the best way to protect what we have, and improve it further in the years ahead.

What does the County Council/RSC think of this plan?

We have discussed this plan with both, and they have indicated that they are supportive of the change. We expect formally to ask the regional Head Teacher Board to approve the proposal early in the summer term.

What is going to happen at Parkside with regards to leadership?

We will be advertising for an Executive Headteacher this term, with the aim of the person starting work with us in September. We are confident that we will attract a strong field for the position and make a high quality appointment.

What were the options considered in terms of other academy chains? there is another large local one - such as the Cam Academy Trust (a significant size, with some outstanding secondary schools) Was this considered - is there a statement of pros and cons of such an alternative?

We considered a range of options, including joining another similar size MAT such as Cam Academy Trust. This merger option was the subject of lots of discussion, but was discounted for a number of reasons. The Board has been very clear that it wanted to retain our current ethos and also preserve the operational model of four city schools. It was felt that a merger such as you describe would dilute this. Nor would such a merger bring about the economies of scale and access to dedicated subject specialist support, for example, that we hope to achieve by joining United Learning. We also think that given the national picture, Trusts will increasingly have to merge and merge again to achieve the scale required, and we did not want to enter into a period of extended turbulence. Joining United Learning gives us as much certainty about our future as is possible in the current system. We anticipate retaining the CAP branding within the UL Trust, as the partnership will continue as a distinct operational model, so we do not think this work has been wasted.

How can teachers learn from other schools and teachers hundreds of miles away?

Through a variety of means ranging from online Twilight sessions, CPD and conferences, to excellence visits, subject networks and the advice and support of United Learning's subject advisors and senior education team.

In the light of education policy changing frequently - wouldn't it be less risky to stay in a local trust than go national?

As indicated above, we believe that joining a national MAT is the best way to insure ourselves against frequent changes in education policy, and avoid what could be a need for several mergers over the next five years

Wasn't it wasteful to rebrand / change to CAP - when this is now to be abandoned?

No, because the partnership and the CAP brand will be retained within United Learning

What is the current top slice from Coleridge's budget taken by CAP and what will this be with United?

Currently 4% of the schools' budget supports the central MAT costs, under United Learning it will be £233 per pupil. This is approximately the same.

If there are plans to retain the CAP board - what decision making will lie with them and what with United Learning? What is the value of having so many management layers for Coleridge and its SLT?

United Learning will retain the CAP board as a Partnership Board in order to continue the vision of a 'Leading Learning Partnership' across the 4 schools. This aligns with the United Learning vision of having its schools work together in clusters. We are keen to reduce unnecessary layers of management, but we do need structures to oversee the collaborative aspects of the partnership, such as the sharing of teachers and providing courses on different sites for Coleridge students.

What guarantees does United Learning give about the retention of a LGB and what will its powers be?

United Learning firmly believes in maintaining LGBs as the experts in the local community providing support and challenge to Heads and their teams. Their power will be very similar to our current model.

What ideas has United Learning got to support Coleridge to move to 'good' and how do these differ from the current SLT's development plans?

United Learning's education team will work closely alongside the current SLT to assist them in their move to Good. In doing so, they will build on what is already working well at the school and provide support and challenge to the team to accelerate improvement. United Learning has created a successful model of review and support with which its schools work. SLT and staff will also have access to specialist subject advisors and best practice sharing through CPD events and training.

The opportunities for supporting a school in this way that come from being part of the Group are far greater than would ever be possible in a small MAT or a standalone school.

What tangible benefits will there be for my child and her peer group?

Everything that is currently working well and in place will continue at each of the CAP schools.

By joining United Learning, our pupils and staff will have access to wider opportunities with colleagues and other young people from across their group of schools. One of the many advantages of this is that it will introduce our pupils to students from different and more diverse areas of the country and to work alongside their peers from other United Learning schools. Examples of this include access to the Group's Sports Ambassadors, Scholar's Club lecture series, Group-wide performances and partnerships such as with the Royal Opera House with whom students from across United Learning are currently rehearsing for a performance of Carmen this summer at the Olympic Park.

A key principle of United Learning's Framework for Excellence is Education with Character. In adopting the framework, United Learning schools not only focus on the academic curriculum but also ensure that both in the classroom and in enrichment activities, pupils are encouraged to develop their self-confidence, resilience, global understanding, personal ambition and aspiration.

Pupils will also see the tangible benefits of the greater access to CPD and training that staff will benefit from through being part of the Group.

Are any redundancies foreseen within the first 2 years following the takeover?

United Learning is not planning any enforced redundancies for September. They have committed to work with us to minimise turbulence while at the same time helping us to ensure that we can devote as high a percentage of our funding to classroom activity as possible.

What was the cost of the CAP rebranding that just took place or will this be unaffected by the United takeover?

We plan to retain the CAP brand within United Learning for our local partnership so this will be unaffected.

I'm concerned that the fact it is a Christian charity hasn't come across to parents

United Learning's Christian origins were raised at the parent meeting and explained in full by Jon Coles, its Chief Executive. The charity began life in the 1880s as an Anglican organisation called The Church Schools Company. It was established by a group of Christian benefactors to address what was the then pressing educational need of the day: education for young women. Whilst it had its foundations within the Anglican faith, it has never been formally tied to the Church and its academies are, with a single exception, wholly community schools rather than faith schools, open to children of all faiths and none. United Learning expects schools joining the Group to retain their existing admissions arrangements, and there would be no change to the character or ethos of the CAP schools.

For any project of this size, in addition to benefits, there must also be challenges and weaknesses - let's hear about those.

There could have been challenges to this change, but the Board has worked over the last year to ensure that we join with the right partner and make this a positive move. There will be no detriment to the quality of education, and over time it will improve, and the ethos of the schools will be unaffected.

What are the key challenges for the students? How will school life be different? And how will you collect meaningful feedback from students as you mention in your letter?

We have been holding meetings of student focus groups and these are included in our collated feedback which the Board is considering. As indicated above there will be no changes to school life or the experience of students in September, but over time we will expect the quality of education they receive to improve further.

Student/teacher relationships are a really important part of learning. How can our children feel supported?

They will continue to be supported in the way they are now. Pastoral care is a strong feature of our schools and we expect that to continue.

How does United Learning support the curriculum across schools?

Some schools that have joined in the past had weak curricula at KS3 so United Learning undertook a lot of work collaboratively to build a common entitlement curriculum with input from a number of teachers and experts across the MAT - how this is taught is up to schools. United Learning have developed specific lesson by lesson courses providing a strong basis for teaching, strong core resources and Schemes of Work. The teachers can use, adapt, select sections to use if they want. If a department is not doing well, then we would come in to support. The Group has also consulted with HoDs across schools to develop a very consultative process.

Would United Learning work with the LGB to implement any changes?

Yes - United Learning work closely with LGBs and any proposals are taken to LGB to discuss first. Chairs of LGBs will meet half termly with regional directors for reviews. Full days are allocated to talking to students, parents, observing lessons etc, then report back to Chairs and LGBs.

Will the funding be ring-fenced for CAP?

The funding comes from ESFA according to local formula for each school so funding formula will be the same. It doesn't go into a central pot - all will be allocated correctly according to formula. National funding formula in the future will hopefully ensure fairer funding. We could potentially have access to bid for more via United Learning.

Can you assure the continuation of CAST as a UTC? And is there a timeframe?

Yes - the aim is to keep CAST as a UTC, grow the numbers though United Learning have confirmed that they have no intention of closing it and the signs of growth are encouraging with the roll increasing.

How do you intend to sustain high achievement at PCC?

With small groups of schools, we need to learn from other networks from which PCC has benefitted in the past - we need the opportunity to get even better. This can apply to all our schools. The problem for the future is that small trusts do not have the infrastructure to keep improving which is risk, not a problem. The risk is that we as a small trust would become isolated. We need to focus on continuous improvement. LAs don't have the means to support schools any more - to develop and improve and scope to learn and develop we need to be part of something bigger.

With regard to Parkside 6th - what is your IB/BTEC experience? How can we grow this?

United Learning have a strong track record working on distinctive offers like this. For example they have independent schools offering IB.

How big can United Learning become?

They don't have a goal or ceiling - growth is based on cluster groups. The economies of scale work well with this model, but after this year there will be a period of consolidation.

How much engagement has there been with staff? And will pay and conditions remain the same?

We have held meetings with staff across schools. All pay and conditions are protected under TUPE regulations.

What will actually change for our children?

There will be no dramatic changes - very gradual process of improvement will take place.

Will the schools remain catchment based?

There will be no change to admission arrangements of schools. We have kept our admissions criteria to be community based principles and these will stay the same.