

FAQs of Federations

What are federations?

A federation is a group of two or more schools that work in partnership in order to raise standards, with some degree of shared governance activity. The Education Act 2002 made such provisions for schools working together to create either informal or formal collective agreements.

Why do schools federate/What are the advantages for schools of joining a federation?

Each school has individual strengths and weaknesses and many realise that they can benefit from sharing either best practice or resources. This process affords schools more time and resources for teaching and learning. Existing successful models of collaboration between schools has shown that all schools benefit from a wider teaching expertise and a shared commitment with other establishments to raise the quality of teaching, learning and leadership.

What types of schools can federate?

Any type of school can agree to work together, formally or informally, including FE institutions, independent schools, academies and city technology colleges. However, only maintained schools can federate under a single governing body (thereby creating a 'hard' federation). A formal federation of this type could simultaneously collaborate with other maintained or non-maintained schools in a more informal way.

Can community schools federate with voluntary aided and voluntary maintained?

Yes – in either a soft federation with a joint strategic committee or in a hard federation with a single governing body.

Can extended schools become part of a federation?

Yes. There is increasing interest in federation models involving groups of schools working with broader service providers – for example, health, social services and others.

Can independent schools become part of a federation?

Independent schools may federate with any other type of school in a variety of ways – with shared governance or without – except in a hard federation, where one governing body is formed. This is only possible between maintained schools.

Can special schools become part of a federation?

Yes. It is increasingly the case that federations seek to be as inclusive as possible and special schools are an important part of the educational community.

Can FE colleges become part of a federation?

FE colleges cannot become part of a federation where there is shared governance. They can, however, join a more informal collaborative or partnership which is not bound by statutory collaboration or federation regulations.

Can other agencies and institutions become part of a federation?

Yes – with shared governance or without - except in a hard federation, where one governing body is formed. This is only possible between (maintained) schools. There is increasing interest in federation models involving groups of schools working with broader service providers – for example, health, social services and others.

What is an Education Improvement Partnership (EIP)?

Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs) are an enabling mechanism to allow schools and other partners to work together to raise standards and to take on wider responsibilities for the children and young people within their local community. They will enable existing and future partnerships or federations to evolve to deliver a range of local authority responsibilities. For more information, please refer to the EIP website at:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/educationimprovementpartnerships/>

What is a formal agreement within a federation context?

There are several types of formal agreements and whether you need them is dependent on the type of federation which you are part of. Formal agreements can include: A single governing body for two or more schools; joint strategic committees for overseeing a soft federation; contractual arrangement for sharing resources or personnel across a collaborative or a federation and the appointment of additional sponsor governors - either for separate governing bodies in a soft federation or for the single merged governing body in a hard federation.

How formal must the agreement be between federated schools?

Schools can work together with any degree of formality. Collaboratives are groups of schools with no formal agreement to work together, whereas soft or hard federations have joint strategic committees and joint governing bodies respectively, whose formation must adhere to education regulations.

How many governing bodies must a federation have?

The number of governing bodies is dependent upon which model of federation you adopt. A soft federation model has multiple governing bodies – one each for each individual school – and a hard federation model has a single governing body for the whole federation.

How many members does the governing body of a federation have?

The number of governors within a federation is dependent upon the type of federation. Member schools within collaboratives (with no shared governance) and soft federations (with joint strategic committees) operate as separate institutions and thus the number of governors remains the same as a single school. However, for hard federations where there exists only one governing body, it is usual that the number of governors may vary from 9 to 20. However, there are specific exceptions dependent upon size of federation and how many headteachers there are. Please consult the article 21 of the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2004.

How many headteachers must a federation have?

The number of headteachers within a federation is dependent upon the type of federation, although headteachers may vary for any number of schools and as such this is not unique to federation. For example, a head can be 'shared' between a number of schools – more usually as an executive head – as long as each school has a named head.

What is a DfES pilot federation?

Partly as a result of the provisions for federations laid out in the Education Act 2002, 35 DfES 'pilot' federations were created to monitor the process and reality of federating and to garner the learning so it could later be distributed nationwide.

How do federations fund themselves?

Federations fund themselves in a variety of ways. Often, federations have formed in order to share resources and save capital. The process of moving towards federation may require an initial 'start up' investment, but member schools often end up saving money, rather than having to invest more in the process.

Is there any extra/additional funding available specifically for the development of a federation?

There are no DfES funds specifically available for the development of a federation. There are many working and active federations whom, although they received an initial investment, have begun to publicise their learning from the process, thereby making it easier and less costly for newer federations.

How can/must a budget be split between schools within a federation?

There are no regulations stipulating how any part of a federation's pooled budget should be split between member schools, except that the process is expected to be as fair as possible and entirely transparent.