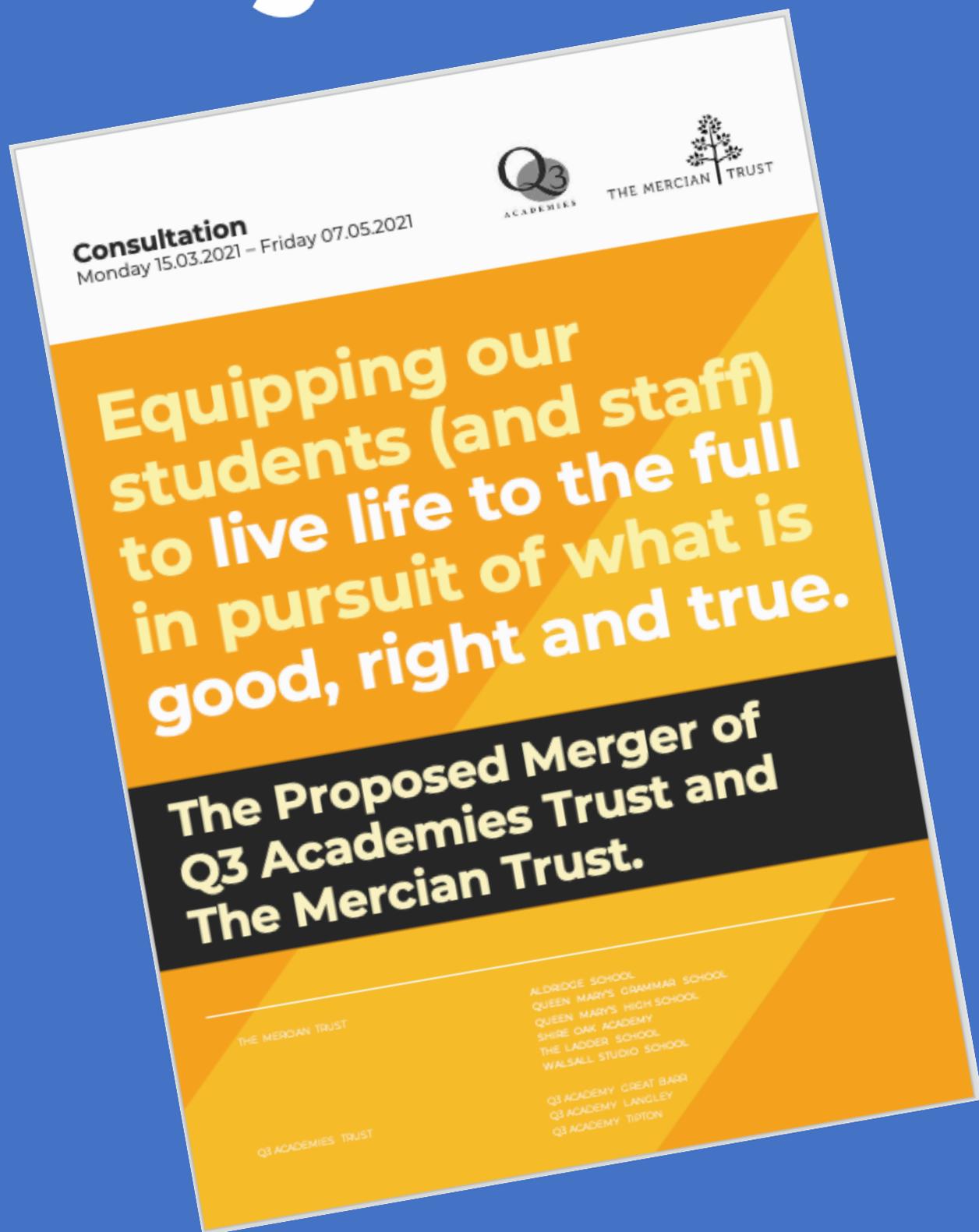


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Stakeholder Consultation

The Q3 & Mercian Merger Proposal Consultation Outcome

This report was prepared by Sara Gadzik of Smith Gadzik Communications, May 2021.

Background

Following a period of working in strategic partnership, in the Spring term 2021 the Q3 Academies Trust and The Mercian Trust announced their intention to merge into one multi-academy trust (MAT).

*By coming together, both MATs aim to secure and support the future of all their schools, with a common purpose of equipping students to **live life to the full** in pursuit of what is **good, right and true**.*

To engage key stakeholders, including parents, staff, school governors and the local community, the trusts held a staff and stakeholder consultation exercise which ran from 15th March to 7th May 2021.

The consultation included:

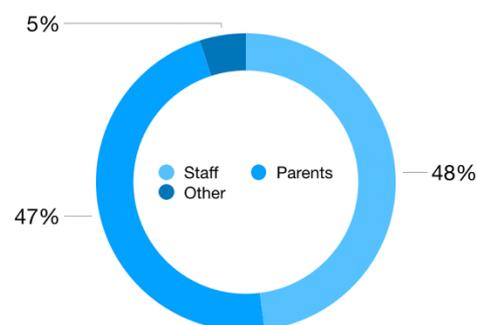
- a merger proposal document which explained the rationale for the change, available online
- a list of frequently asked questions, updated throughout the consultation period
- an online form to submit questions or concerns
- an online survey to respond to the consultation
- a series of meetings (held by video conference due to Covid restrictions) for staff, parents and union representatives

- individual meetings with trustees of both MATs, each headteacher and LGB Chair and both Walsall and Sandwell Local Authorities.

In order to ensure impartiality, the online consultation exercise was carried out by an independent consultancy, Smith Gadzik Communications. The consultation events were hosted and run by the trusts, as they were best placed to answer questions and present the case for the merger.

Response overview

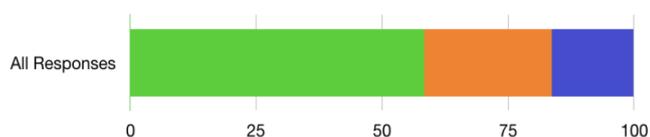
A total of 674 individuals completed the consultation form (690 forms were submitted, with 16 discounted as duplicates or blank). Of these, 47% were from parents, 48% were from staff, and the other 5% were a mix of other stakeholders including governors, local authority representatives and local residents.



In addition, 314 individuals attended one of the 16 consultation meetings that were held. Of these, 227 attended staff meetings, 53 attended parental meetings and 34 attended union meetings. Individual meetings were held with other key stakeholders, including local authority representatives, trustees and local school governing bodies.

The results of this consultation exercise demonstrate **clear support** for the proposed merger of Q3 Academies and The Mercian Trust.

Of the 674 total online survey responses, 58% (391) were in favour of the merger and 16% (110) were unsure. Only 25% (170) were not in support of the proposal.



Of those in favour, an overwhelming majority (88%) felt that it would lead to **more opportunities and better outcomes for students.**

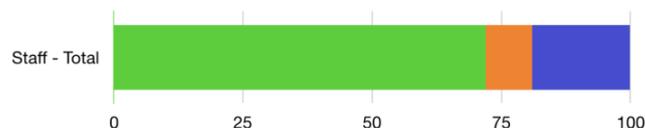
A sizable majority (58%) also said it would create more opportunities for staff and staff development.

Of those opposed to the merger, a wide range of reasons were given. However, the most common themes were:

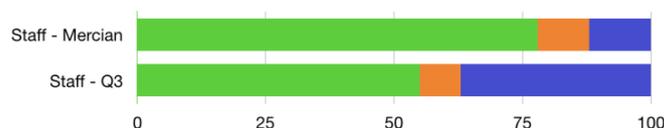
- not being convinced of the benefits of a larger, combined trust (45%)
- fear of losing a school's identity or reputation (24%), and
- concern that standards [in academically selective schools] would slip (22%).

Staff response

On the whole, staff across both trusts were strongly positive about the proposed merger, with 72% (230) in favour, 10% (31) against and 18% (60) unsure

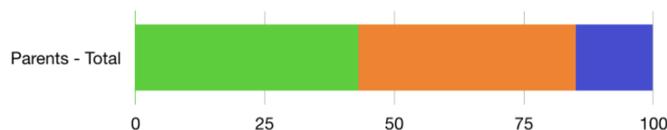


Staff in the Mercian Trust were more vocal in their support for the merger than those at Q3 and unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of Q3 staff (36%) were unsure of the impact of the merger (as Q3 is the smaller trust of the two and it is Q3 staff that will 'TUPE over' into a new employer as a result the proposed merger).



Parental response

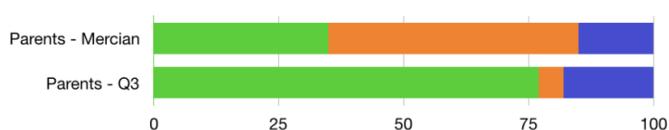
As a cohort, parents were more wary of the merger than the respondent group overall. This result is not unexpected, as those with concerns are more likely to make their feelings known than those who are neutral or positive. In total 43% of parents were in favour of the merger, 42% opposed and 15% were unsure.



The cohort with the greatest reservations were parents from the Mercian Trust, and in particular from Queen Mary's Grammar School and Queen Mary's High School. Parents of children currently attending the grammar schools were the most vocal group as well, representing 149 (22%) of the total respondents.

There are estimated to be around 3,000 parents of children attending the two selective schools, 149 responded to the survey, 7 attended the consultation meeting(s).

Of the 267 Mercian parents who responded, 35% were in favour, 50% against and 15% unsure. While the cohort of Q3 parents was smaller (57), in contrast they were much more optimistic about the benefits of the merger, with 77% in favour, 5% against, and 18% unsure.



Response of other stakeholders

Other key stakeholders have been firmly supportive of the merger plans.

Walsall and Sandwell Local Authorities have engaged positively in the consultation exercise and have expressed their support for the proposal.

Senior leaders from Mercian and Q3 also met personally with trustees, local governing body chairs, and the headteachers at each school, all of whom expressed their support for the merger and the benefits it would bring to students and staff.

Consultation meetings

The data suggests that the consultation meetings were successful in educating stakeholders about the benefits of the merger and allaying fears about change.

Prior to the consultation meetings, at the end of the second week of the online consultation, there were 196 responses of which 43% were in favour, 46% were against and 12% unsure. As the consultation meetings started to take place, and the frequently asked questions (FAQs) were updated with more detailed information, the number responding favourably began to rise steadily until it reached the final tally of 58%.

Questions asked

A total of 48 questions were submitted via the 'ask a question' form on the website in addition to 56 questions submitted via the online survey itself by individuals who provided their contact details. Further questions were also posed at the consultation meetings. These covered a wide range of topics ranging from school uniforms to how the trust will manage risk.

The most common questions submitted online (7 times) were about job security, particularly in relation to support staff in schools and trust central teams. A record of questions by theme and category is included at the end of this report.

Where email addresses were provided, responses were sent directly to individuals. In addition, the frequently asked questions were updated 3 times throughout the consultation period, to provide clarity, give reassurance on specific points and add detail.

Questions submitted online Responses grouped by category	
Governance and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risks (3) • Operational (3) • Benefits (2) • Governance (2) • Timescale
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixth form (4) • Admissions criteria (3) • Benefits • Extracurricular activities
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job security (7) • Job location • Support staff roles • Workload • Pay arrangements
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits (4) • Term dates (4) • Culture (2) • Uniform (2) • Funding • Location • Autonomy • Operational

Questions submitted online Responses grouped by stakeholder groups	
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms and conditions • Holidays • Working across sites • Opportunities for staff to progress • Sharing of best practice
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of uniforms • Holidays • Working day • Retaining the uniqueness of the schools e.g. selective grammar school status
Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff terms and conditions • TUPE arrangements • Any potential redundancies • Harmonisation of policies and staff consultation • Harmonisation of term dates • Cross site working arrangements • Pay dates • Pay Progression • Facilities time • Trade Union recognition and agreement

Next Steps

The trust boards of both MATs are grateful for all the responses received during the consultation process. The results will be considered independently by both MATs before taking a decision whether or not to submit a merger application to the Regional Schools Commissioner.