

**An investigation of the implementation of the  
Academies Act 2010 in English Schools:  
Stakeholders' lived experiences regarding policies  
and practices in English Academies**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is based on a project which focuses upon academisation and its perceived impact upon the raising of standards. The study was undertaken in 2013. There were 18 participants in total. Sixteen were from 4 different schools and a consultant principal and an Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families were also part of the case study. The perceived impact is demonstrated through the lived experiences of various stakeholders in relation to the introduction of the Academies Act 2010. I adopted an interpretivist approach through the use of semi-structured interviews and analysis of policy documents. Case study was chosen to demonstrate the differing perspectives of stakeholders in the same setting and compare those to stakeholders in a different setting. Participants, all of whom had been in a teaching environment for at least 15 years, were of differing levels of seniority and roles.

I am a practising solicitor but used to be a qualified teacher. I have combined my expertise in law and education to produce an analysis of how a statute which is a national policy, has been received and interpreted at a local level by a number of participants.

The findings show that there was only one participant who was aware of the existence of the Academies Act as the policy which governs the environment within which stakeholders involved in this study work. They did not appear to perceive a direct link between the raising of standards and the academisation process. The perception of the stakeholders regarding the aims of the Act differed depending upon his or her role and level of seniority within the school and the position of the school academically and financially pre-academisation. The raising of attainment was only considered to be an aim by half of the principals or head teachers. Schools which were already high performing did not see academisation as a way to improve. Underperforming schools pre-academisation were in receipt of support and raising attainment was a focus in any event. Likewise, schools which were already financially stable did not see finance necessarily as an aim. However, the financial gain was seen to be an attraction which could bring with it the opportunity to be creative in the school's use of the budget. Autonomy was the most popular response as an aim for academisation.

The process of academisation touched various elements within participant schools: finance, attainment, behaviour, curriculum, staff, collaboration, professional development, intake and ethos. However, overall, these were not directly linked to academisation.

Curriculum freedom to enhance pupils' opportunity to be able to compete with pupils academically in an international arena was considered favourably to be an aim of the Act. The lack of awareness of the Act and its contents by the stakeholders minimises the potential of stakeholders to develop the schools when they do not appreciate the framework within which they work. Therefore, more attention to staff development concerning the Act could ensure that the schools are maximising the stakeholders' potential and thus having maximum impact upon the schools. The position of a school pre-academisation and whether it was a converter or sponsored academy may affect the perceptions of those stakeholders. All schools saw an impact during the change to an academy. However, it is difficult for stakeholders to say whether the impact would have occurred or not if the school had not academised.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This is a research project in which I have personal experiences of academies, which prompted me to examine this under-researched area of the education system in the UK through a case study approach. It is argued that there is a void in investigating the effectiveness of academies as far as the lived experiences of those working at a local level under the implementation of the national policy is concerned.

The implementation of new policies within education and in particular an entirely new school system is based upon the notion of changing the status quo. I considered Michael Fullan's theory of change as potentially playing a part within the study and it could have been a credible framework but I wanted to emphasise a slightly different angle and therefore chose not to use it in this research. However, a continuation of this research using Fullan's theory may well be appropriate (Fullan, 2006). Upon closer examination of various elements of his theory I discovered that it was not appropriate to base the entire study upon this theory. However, I acknowledge that there are parts of his theory with relevance to this study. Taking into account the significance of political influences behind the introduction of academies and the subsequent changes implemented by schools that have become academies, I have focused upon the 2010 White Paper and the work of Stephen Ball (DFE, 2010). Ball is a policy sociologist who provides a critical lens in which education policy may be viewed. It should always be considered as to who funds any piece of research as to whether the researcher is impartial. A researcher may cease to be independent and become biased when the research is funded. A case study approach to conduct the study was felt to be appropriate given the emphasis upon capturing lived experiences of stakeholders at a particular instance.

In 1997, the Labour Government initiated the academies as a vehicle to raise standards among other aims which are to be discussed below; in particular, the stakeholders' perceptions of the aims of the academies being drawn together by the Academies Act 2010 (National Audit Office, 2010, The National Archives, 2010). Essentially academies were to be schools outside of Local Authority control whereby funding was received directly by the individual school as opposed to receiving it via the Local Authority as it saw fit. In principle, this notion seems simple and manageable. However, the funds, which were taken from the local authority budgets, took into account the number of academies within the area and the amount the academies would need to source the services in the private sector as opposed to being a reflection upon the amount actually being spent by the local authority, as noted by the Scrutiny Task and Finish Working Group (2012). However, this is a government organisation and thus could be swayed by the need to demonstrate the positivity of academies given the source of its funding and the importance of the success of academies for some political parties which have supported their existence. Single academies were more likely to need higher budgets because they would not obtain the same rates as local authorities procuring services on behalf of large numbers of schools. Academies were also free to buy back the services from the local authority ultimately leading to a disproportionate change in local authority budgets (Practical Law, 2011).

In 1997 the 'Fresh Start' schools were created whereby underperforming schools closed in the July and reopened in the September (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). The concept that closing a school one day and reopening it another day will automatically change the success of a school can be a misconception as will be demonstrated by the lived experiences of stakeholders in this research found particularly in Chapter Four. This marks a mini-version of the academies whereby an academy starts as a state maintained school, closes and then reopens under new governance. Fullan champions the collaboration of all those involved in the process as being key to the success of any change (Ellsworth, 2000). Therefore, whether

or not the 'Fresh Start' schools were successful would have depended greatly upon the stakeholders involved in the change. The analysis of political dynamics and the impact upon the socio-economic situation of a country is prevalent when considering where the UK sits in relation to other countries in the arena of education. There has been, and still is, a fear across the country that pupils generally cannot, and, in the future will not, be able to compete at an international level with their counterparts from other countries and therefore there was a need to drastically improve standards (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015).

This chapter outlines the introduction of academies, the different types of academies, the aim of the current research, the development of research questions and the current perception of academies on the education system today.

## **1.2 The introduction of academies**

Each government demonstrates a different stance regarding academies and has tried to promote the concept of academies to the public voters in order to gain the buy-in from parents and thus ensure the party becomes re-elected. New Labour purported to support academies as a way of improving standards in underperforming schools and schools in disadvantaged areas (Long, 2015). The coalition government aimed to produce a school system in which there is increased autonomy for individual schools offering parents choice, concentrating upon improvement of standards in all schools in comparison to the international field (DFE, 2015a). It is still too early in the development of the academies to conclude whether the increased autonomy is such and what impact it has had (McNally, 2015, Eyles et al, 2016). There is still insufficient evidence to show the overall connection between change in funding following academisation and the improvement of standards in schools. However, according to McNally (2015), the increase in resources does appear to be more effective for schools in disadvantaged areas. The increase in autonomy has also caused some controversy in terms of who are being employed by the academies and whether or not they have a teaching qualification (Larsen et al., 2011). This strongly questions whether academies can be left to their own devices to make good decisions for the benefit of pupils or whether they are merely making financial business decisions when recruiting staff. The Conservative government under the Prime Minister Theresa May's leadership in 2017 supports selection in schools and the programme whereby underperforming schools which under David Cameron's Conservative government would have been forced to academise has been removed (Wallace, 2016).

Academies were introduced with the aim to impact upon standards in the UK through curriculum change, teacher continuous professional development (CPD) and development of relationships (Chapman, 2013), and to give schools more freedom to operate without the constraints of the Local Authority (West, 2015). This means that academies have autonomy over their finances, curriculum, staffing structures (Keddie, 2014) and the general organisation and conduct of the school diversifying its provisions (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). However, academies are still restricted by the testing and standards measures implemented at national level with which all schools are compared (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015).

Academies have changed over the years and have been seen in different guises; they did not originally exist in the current structure. Academies were independent schools, for the majority funded by central government as opposed to local authorities, which sponsored, established and managed them (Long, 2015). The original academies were City Academies which were considered to be the vehicles to transform education in the UK (Long, 2015). They were developed as a result of City Technical Colleges which were established in the mid 1980s being the start of privatisation in schooling following the 1988 Reform Act. Academies stem from city technology colleges which have become part of a countrywide change whereby

business is taking over the running of school establishments yet being funded by central government (West and Bailey, 2013).

The academies in the UK can be compared to those in Sweden. However, in Sweden there were more independent secondary schools than comprehensives. Sweden went from fee-paying schools to grant-aided which differs from the system in the UK. It is interesting to note that the changes have occurred faster in the UK than in Sweden because there are more financial incentives to become an academy in the UK than in Sweden. Academies in the UK are non-profit making whereas in Sweden they are (West, 2014). I am aware of comparisons between school systems, but this is not the focus of this research. Instead, the focus is upon stakeholders' lived experiences and their perception of the aim of academies. The financial incentive in the UK is important as this explains why the changes have taken place at such a rate (BBC News, 2011, DFE, 2016b). This is in comparison to similar systems abroad where there is no or less financial incentive to academies with less expenditure upon schools (OECD, 2014).

Academies are awarded more freedom than schools maintained by the Local Authority in terms of governance. This relates to all aspects of management, curriculum, pay and conditions, staffing, intake and exclusion and in particular finances and procurement of services (DFE, 2011a). It is discussed later in this research project as to whether these advantages of becoming an academy are true advantages and do have a positive impact on participants receiving the implementation of a national policy at a local level.

There are two types of academies: sponsored and converter. Schools which are in a strong position in terms of performance have the opportunity to convert to an academy hence these are converter academies. Alternatively, schools which are underperforming and have not succeeded to a sufficiently high rating upon inspection are forced to become academies through sponsorship and these are sponsored academies (Coldron et al., 2014). Sponsored academies often become part of chains. This research does not focus upon the difference between sponsored and converter, chain and non-chain academies, but on the lived experiences of stakeholders generally across a variety of academies. However, I do note the importance of the guidance and direction, previously given by the Local Authority or government, when an academy is part of a chain and the relationships forged as a result of an academy being part of a chain or sponsored as opposed to being a converter (Salokangas and Chapman, 2014).

The Education White Paper published following the 2016 budget has expanded the notion of academies (DFE, 2016a). If the proposals in the White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' are effected then Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, will have radically changed the education system (Husbands, 2016). The White Paper proposes that by the end of 2022 all schools will be academies run by Multi Academy Trusts (MAT). The MATs will allow schools to share resources and there will be further funding support in order that this will assist in creating a system of education which is ranked amongst the world's best (DFE, 2016a). The White Paper brings about high expectations in order to create a world-leading curriculum in an effort to re-establish the country's education standing in the international arena (Dickens, 2016).

This policy will reshape the local authority's role within the education system. Schools will no longer be managed locally but instead directed from central government by way of MATs. The local authority's role will change whereby the local authority will step back and no longer maintain schools but ensure that every child has a school place, examine and support pupils' needs and support parents (Dickens, 2016). Parents will lose their involvement in school governance and instead directors will be appointed to a school's board of governance. Therefore, the local authority will no longer maintain schools and assist with school improvement but instead will focus upon parents and the local community (DFE, 2016a).



### **1.3 Research questions**

The following research questions were developed with the aim to address whether improvement in pupil attainment has taken place in academies in the eyes of those working on the ground with pupils and what impact the national policy has had on individuals who are subject to working as part of it.

1. What are education stakeholders' perceptions of the aims of the Academies Act 2010?
2. What are the lived experiences of stakeholders who have been in a school whilst it has gone through academisation?

An analysis of the Academies Act 2010 or the White Paper as per Lumby and Muijs (2014) would be a topic in its own right which merits research. To analyse an Act of Parliament in its entirety in this project would be too broad and therefore, the focus needs to be narrowed in order to give a more in depth understanding of a particular aspect as opposed to a broad-brush approach of the whole Act (Laerd, 2016). Therefore, the perceived impact of the introduction of the Academies Act upon the stakeholders' experiences will be examined in relation to elements of school life, in particular attainment, on which they feel working in an academy has impacted.

### **1.4 The Impact of academies**

Most academies appear to be making good progress in comparison to Local Authority maintained schools (National Audit Office, 2010). Performance across the country is improved generally and, therefore, it is unclear as to which institutions these improvements are attributable (National Audit Office, 2014). Sponsored primary academies are improving more quickly than local authority maintained academies. Converter academies also increase in performance, (DFE, 2015b, Worth, 2014). Therefore, the gap widens between sponsored and converter academies as the converter academies start at a higher level. Conservative government decided to continue and expand the academy programme therefore these results may be couched in these terms as support for their decision to extend the programme. This aspect of improvement is only very small in comparison to GCSE result comparisons (DFE, 2015c). Previous results have not necessarily shown an improvement because there was insufficient time to embed the changes in order to make a noticeable difference. The GCSE results in academies appear to be improving at a faster rate than those in maintained schools (Public Accounts Committee, 2007). The performance across academies is improving but there is still a lack of consistency in certain aspects (PricewaterhouseCooper, 2008). A comparison of results between Key Stage 2 and GCSE shows better progress in academies than in Local Authority maintained schools (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008). However, the progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 results is not as good in academies as that in Local Authority maintained schools and neither are the A-Level results (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008). The results are incongruent and do not therefore allow a direct correlation between academisation and improved pupil attainment to be drawn. This is surprising given that the research was commissioned by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), which is now the DFE a government department which supposedly promotes social mobility. A piece of research commissioned by the coalition government, as was the research carried out by PricewaterhouseCooper (2008), would be expected to support the notion that attainment is being positively affected by a school becoming an academy given the government's support for academisation. However, research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) also shows the government's support for academisation.

Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 outcomes on a range of performance measures, is higher after two years in sponsored academies compared to similar non-academy schools (Worth 2014:4).

This differs when looking at converter academies where there is no significant difference between converter academies and similar non-academy schools. In addition, when analysing GCSE results there is no significant difference between the results of sponsored academies and similar non-academies (Worth, 2014).

Although there are improvements in academies across a lot of subject areas the results for English, Maths, literacy and numeracy are still a cause for concern (National Audit Office, 2010). Literacy and numeracy are still subjects that drag behind the other subjects in comparison to Local Authority maintained schools (Public Accounts Committee, 2007). Academies are still statistically achieving at a lower level than Local Authority maintained schools (NFER, 2015b, Stewart, 2015). This source independently expresses the lack of evidence to champion privatised schools in the form of academies above local authority maintained schools. It is questionable as to the use of academies. However, there has been, and still is, the belief that academies will catch up in time, though there is no statistical evidence to support this notion (National Audit Office, 2010, DFE, 2016a). It is not surprising this is shown in these reports given that they are orchestrated by the government which needs academies to be a success.

Academies cater for pupils of a variety of backgrounds and perhaps do so more effectively than in Local Authority maintained schools in relation to the freedom to respond to individual pupil needs by using finances in a bespoke way for the individual school (National Audit Office, 2010; Gorard, 2014). Evidence seems to demonstrate that if academies continue in the same vein as their past performance, in terms of inclusion and deprivation, then, in the future, the gap will be addressed and narrowed (National Audit Office, 2010). In practice, the gap has not narrowed and the converter academies continue to improve and thus increase the gap (NFER, (2015a), Bolton, (2014)). However, on the other hand, those from a poorer, more deprived, background may find it more difficult to access certain academies as some academies are being more selective about their intake by using a covert selection process (Gunter, 2011).

Academy schools appear to be on track when considering the level of improved attainment in comparison to financial expenditure (NFER, 2015a). Thus, academies are considered to be good value for money (National Audit Office, 2010). However, academies are generally more expensive to run and maintain than schools maintained by the Local Authority (Public Accounts Committee, 2007). Academies can set their own levels for pay in an effort to attract better quality staff thus creating higher staffing expenditure than state maintained schools. The major financial incentive for a school to be a sponsored academy is that, if upon academisation it has a deficit, this will be absorbed by the Local Authority budget. However, if a school is running at a profit, then it is allowed to carry this forward when it becomes an academy. The situation differs if a school converts to an academy. If a school converts with a surplus, then, again the academy receives the surplus but, if there is a deficit upon conversion, the DFE pay the Local Authority and then the academy has to refund the DFE (DFE, 2015d). Therefore, there is a serious question as to whether Local Authorities can financially take the hit of a large number of schools academising. The government is forced to manage the finances and additional expenses brought with academies (National Audit Office, 2012). The cost of academies appears to be an issue. Therefore, the managerial teams within academies who have probably never in the past had to manage such a budget need to have proper training and guidance so that they are able to handle the project management and financial management of the school (Public Accounts Committee, 2007).

Education policy has changed over the years at a rapid pace and seems to be changing daily. This could be accounted for by the use of technology which has allowed more data driven pressures and a more demanding approach by those who control policy (Wood, 2013). This has even affected the way in which progress is measured which can be in as little time as a few minutes when teaching and learning is observed as opposed to over a term or half term (The Key for School Leaders, 2015). Due to technology gathering data in relation to the success of a school is now more available than years gone by. There seems to be a continual

push for higher targets and improvement which occur as a reaction to external forces. This may result in the implementation of measures which are not always finalised or indeed precisely planned. Policy analysis has a role to play as opposed to creating policy as a result of reacting to an issue (Whitty, 2005). Funding has always driven education and in today's climate is an ever-increasing pressure with which schools have to deal (Ward and Eden, 2010). This can be seen as an immediate issue where schools when converting to academies need to be able to show that they do not have a deficit upon which they receive the balance due to them. If there is a deficit upon conversion a repayment is due (DFE, 2015d). Following this is the controversial issue of the Funding Agreement which must be negotiated with the Local Authority. It is questionable whether the changes in education policy have shown dramatic improvement. This depends upon how improvement is measured and the aim of the researchers' research will also determine how the changes are measured.

It has been claimed that strong, good quality, and experienced sponsors, which most academies seem to possess, are key to a successful academy and are where some of the most noticeable changes lie (PricewaterhouseCooper, 2008; Eyles and Machin, 2015). Both of these sources are commissioned by government departments and therefore seem to support its political agenda. Academy sponsors are to use their professionalism to direct their energies towards target setting and the measurement of the same (Papanastasiou, 2017). A positive feature of academisation is the flexibility to vary staffing, pay and conditions and offer incentives such as flexible working hours (PricewaterhouseCooper, 2008). This flexibility can only be a success if the sponsor is an expert in the field, has the resources to support academy staff and can guide academies to use these flexibilities to their advantage instead of using them without purpose simply because they are available (Chapman, 2013). No matter how much flexibility academies are granted, they cannot circumvent fair access and procedures such as for the removal of poor staff. Prior to academisation, academy sponsors are not freely given data regarding the quality of teaching within a school. Therefore, the academy continues with its staff who are contracted and may then struggle to remove staff of poor quality (Policy Exchange, 2010). Despite the freedom, academies are still restricted to a certain extent and are still subject to Ofsted inspection and so have to comply with its criteria thus limiting their freedom to some extent (National Audit Office, 2014).

Ultimately the reports discussed above demonstrate that there is insufficient data available to make a definitive judgement as to whether improved pupil attainment is directly attributable to academisation or whether there are a number of other external contributing factors (PricewaterhouseCooper, 2008; Eyles and Machin, 2015). Therefore, if data alone is unable to establish a link, it is necessary to look at alternative sources of information. I wish to consider the experiences of those involved in the regime to ascertain whether their lived experiences establish that academies have improved attainment and daily aspects of school life. There is evidence to suggest that the type of school a child attends can determine his or her level of attainment (Gorard, 2014). Therefore, I question whether attending an academy can improve attainment and children's experience of schooling.

## **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter one: The introduction chapter sets the scene for the research and puts the research into context demonstrating my aims and desired impact of my research.

Chapter two: The literature review chapter critiques relevant and current literature relating to academies and their effectiveness and development.

Chapter three: The research design chapter sets out the stages which I performed to undertake the research and the reasons and justifications for my choice of research design.

Chapter four: The findings and analysis chapter are based upon analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants.

Chapter five: The concluding chapter provides a summary of the research project and offers a conclusion to the study and how researchers in the future could develop the research further.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter offers a critique of literature relating to education policy focusing upon the Academies Act. The elements which will be considered are the question of policy and what constitutes policy, what is the Academies Act 2010, the drivers for the Academies Act 2010 and the political stance surrounding the introduction of the Academies Act. This is legislation which has emerged across two governments and has been included in political manifestos of various parties persuading or dissuading voters (Sippitt, 2015). The chapter will also examine how policy can be analysed and demonstrates the framework for policy analysis.

Changes to the school system have been discussed by a variety of academics such as Ball and Exley 1997; Ward and Eden, 2010, Lawson and Silver, 2007, Hatcher, 2006, West and Bailey, 2013. However, there is limited literature available regarding academies and the reasoning for their existence which compares political party views in relation to their existence. Fullan's change theory focuses on the human element of participation in the change process. How to manage and cope with change differs from Fullan's theory. Fullan directs importance upon how to cope with its effects as opposed to initiating change and how it is received by those affected by the instrument of change and its impact upon stakeholders. (Fullan, 2007). Those involved in change need to be experts within the field of change to ensure change is effective (Fullan, 2006). Fullan presents the theory of change in four stages: initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome (Fullan, 2007). Clearly, each of these phases is dependent upon the success of the previous when considering a cause and effect situation. As I have previously stated, Fullan's theory was not at the centre of the research as all four stages were not appropriate to the study. However, I have considered Fullan's theory of change where outcome is concerned whereby the outcome of the change is the stakeholder's perceptions of it. That is to say how stakeholders received the policy and its outcome for them as individuals. Stage four of Fullan's theory is relevant as to how academies changed the environment within which stakeholders work and thus their perceptions of the environment.

Section 2.2 in this literature review will analyse the literature surrounding the notion of policy and what constitutes policy. Section 2.3 will consider the various ways in which policy may be analysed. Section 2.4 will consider what the Academies Act 2010 entails. Section 2.5 will demonstrate the possible drivers for Academies Act 2010 and 2.6 will consider the research questions.

It is important to carry out a literature review and to explore definitions of concepts so that I and ultimately my readers, when undertaking further research, will have an understanding of possible diverse meanings attached to one concept. Thus, a literature review should eliminate, as far as is possible, confusion or unwarranted assumptions. A literature review enables the researcher to gain a better understanding of analysing and synthesising research literature in order to develop his or her own research (Maxwell, 2006). The researcher is able to establish the literature based on previous research and how his or her research may fill any potential gaps which have been left by the research that has already been undertaken (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2013). Therefore, it is hoped, through this literature review, to establish literature that has already been produced surrounding the elements of research in relation to the chosen topic which will then lead me to develop research questions to address through my study.

### **2.2 The question of policy**

The ability to discuss policy firstly requires an understanding of what constitutes policy. Ball (2007) argues that policy can be used to describe different things depending upon the time of description during a particular study, and that the meaning of policy which researchers adopt can affect what is researched and the interpretation of it (Ball, 2007a). The same policy can be interpreted differently and acted upon differently depending upon its setting and locality

(Smith and Abbott, 2014). The concept of policy possibly steers research and may denote the use of particular types of documents. Torjman (2005) highlights the significance of policy by observing that policy influences nearly every aspect of daily life. Policy is a powerful tool used by many governing bodies, institutions and organisations which hold a position of power to influence and shape the future of today's society. The existence of policy touches communities from every walk of life. For this reason, research into policy is of paramount importance. This work was undertaken in Toronto for a private non-profit organisation with no political affiliation and which is not dependent upon government funding. The Caledon Institute draws upon international experience in the field and contributes to the same. The principles underpinning the importance of policy are relevant to any country because every country is dictated by policy whether formally recognised or not.

Policies are naturally filtered down into individual institutions (Trowler, 2003). A government identifies that action needs to be taken from issues which have arisen within the country it governs or from outside this arena but which may affect that particular country. The question then stands as to how a particular government reacts to that issue and any particular changes it may need to initiate. Depending upon which government is in power and who is leading that particular government it will affect the reaction to the issue. Following this there is a compromise between multidisciplinary agencies to specify the exact need for action and how it is to be addressed. Depending upon the particular government in power at the time of a policy being created, it will very much determine whether or not the policy is evidence-based or ideologically based (Rutter, 2012). Policymakers define issues, define parameters for solutions and impose solutions. Therefore, change is not value free as not all persons or bodies identifying the area of change will experience the same issues in the same way and thus may react differently (Bell and Stevenson, 2006). To those who are research based as opposed to politically focused and driven being part of government bodies

policy development is both a continuous and a contested process in which those with competing values and differential access to power seek to form and shape policy in their own interests (Bell and Stevenson, 2006:2).

The government's 'economic agenda is a guide to policy making in all spheres' (Ozga, 2000:59). As an educational researcher Ozga appears to be creating a balance between learning from evidence to make policy and at the same time balancing this with the finances available to the policy makers. According to another educational researcher, Whitty (2005), there is a place for policy analysis of the wider context within which a policy is to be set as opposed to purely reacting to an event or situation. However, Whitty is, arguably, seeing this from a different position with different constraints compared to someone who is a government policy maker restricted by elections and budgets. Once an issue has been identified and multidisciplinary agencies have established where changes to policy are required, the government then has to assess whether there is sufficient funding in place to support such policy changes and whether they are at that moment in time a priority for the country. Ultimately, funding has a large impact upon the decisions made in policy making as the government has an obligation under the Civil Service Code to use public money 'properly and efficiently' (Civil Service, 2015:1).

Policy is a vehicle influencing future actions whereby appropriate decisions are taken to achieve a particular goal (Jennings, 1977). Therefore, policy shapes the actions of members of a community whatever that community may be whether it is a university, school, business or indeed a neighbourhood. Policy can also constitute procedures and methods utilised by organisations which then govern the activities and dealings of the organisation. This then has a consequential effect upon an organisation's relationship with other organisations and the way in which inter-organisational dealings take place. Therefore, policy not only has internal consequences but also impacts upon external communications (Midgley and Livermore, 2012).

Stephen Ball has postulated various definitions of policy over a period of seventeen years from 1990 to 2007. The definitions start with a focus upon the expression of values where Ball describes policy as 'a matter of the authoritative allocation of values'; policies are the operational statements of values, 'statements of prescriptive intent' (Kogan, 1975: 55, cited in Ball, 1993: 3). This then evolves to include the notion of power and control thus adding a hierarchical dimension to the concept of policy. Jessop supports this idea and describes policy as 'part of a more complex power struggle to protect key decisions from popular democratic control' (Jessop, 2002: 200). Policy could be seen in a negative light where policy is being used to control a power struggle. However, it is questionable as to whether this is an appropriate use of policy making and whether there is a bigger picture which is reflected in the policy making process as opposed to the consideration that the policy is an isolated entity.

Policy tends to have a high profile in the news which builds a connotation that policy rests at national level, though many members of society may not believe that policy which is referred to in the media does in fact affect the way in which they live their lives. However, policy can also exist at local or institutional level. The focus of the policy and those involved in the policy creation will determine whether it is a policy which is to stay within a local arena at meso level or whether it is relevant at a national, macro level, or institution based at micro level (Coldron et al., 2014). Policy is made by a variety of people and in differing ways. Policy is more focused around government and then cascaded to a local level (Ball, 2005). The level at which a policy operates does not necessarily determine its value and importance. The purpose of a national and local policy may differ but its worth is inseparable. Ball divides policy into two categories: policy as text and policy as discourse, which are not considered to be inseparable. Policy can be considered as policy makers coding and de-coding their representations in different guises (Ball, 2005). Ball describes policy as discourse as the lever for policy or its agent. Policy levers are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, cited in Ball, 2007a: 48). There are a number of documents which could be considered as the basis of academies. There are other Acts of Parliament referred to in this research from which academies have developed but the focus is upon the 2010 Academies Act governing academies in existence today. Policy as text constitutes the main body of the text itself. Policy is described by Ball as 'typically cannibalised products of multiple influences and agendas' (Ball, 2007a: 45). The influences and agendas could be called the drivers forcing through the establishment of a policy. It is irrelevant at what level a policy is operating, and whether it is at national or local level, it will still have drivers pushing the policy and levers which are the systems created to carry out the purpose or goals of the policy.

Midgley and Livermore (2012) take Jennings' (1977) and Ball's (2007) idea of policy a stage further, extending the parties involved by saying that policies occur in formal settings in which organisations are ruled and rule their members as courses of action which are adopted and adapted. It could be argued that policy on a lower level could also take place in an informal setting such as between a group of friends. The formality is an added layer to concretise the policy's importance. There appears to be an unnecessary focus upon those who will be affected by a policy's implementation and the impact upon those individuals as opposed to a focus upon the policy itself and its overarching aims. The concept of the policy itself is being obscured by the introduction of those who are to receive it. The definition needs to be less person-focused and focus upon an informed decision being needed. This informed decision is necessary prior to the instigation of research into a policy where 'human beings operate collectively' in what they say and do and what the policy is about and what ought to be done rather than considering those upon whom it would impact (TLTP Education, 2013). This idea supports policy being based upon aims and purposes as opposed to thinking about the people it will affect and then perhaps altering the policy to shape and suit those people. More emphasis should be on the aim of the policy and what it is trying to achieve as opposed to the effect upon individuals to whom the policy relates. It could be argued that this method would produce more purposeful and objective policies.

A school system of education has developed over time. Until 1870 education was either private or church-funded. Education Acts 1870 and 1880 saw school becoming compulsory at various ages. The implementation of local authority control was seen in 1902. The first and second world wars in the UK had an effect upon schooling, the ages at which school was compulsory and how pupils were assessed according to which school they would be able to attend. The control of governments throughout history has changed the schooling system and various Education Acts have been introduced along the way. Inspections, admissions, compulsory schooling and child welfare have all been addressed by various governments and through a variety of Education Acts. It would seem that the issues which have been addressed over the years have escalated and the Academies Act 2010 has tried to incorporate all of these with the major change of removing Local Authority control and in particular focusing on funding and private sector input. It could be argued that this is again another policy change for policy sake rather than having in place a robust and informed process leading to its implementation. There are a number of major Acts of Parliament which have influenced and developed the school system in England (Education in England, 2016).

The school system in England has developed over a number of years. Starting in 1980 when a framework for the school curriculum was introduced there followed increased rights for the parents who had children with special needs. As the curriculum developed more influence for parents in schools was introduced focusing on better schools and quality of education in schools. This presented in the form of the introduction of the GCSE qualifications. The national curriculum was then introduced in 1988 to ensure all pupils in all schools had the same education across the system. Ofsted was then introduced to ensure standards across all schools were the same and were maintained. Along with this came the publication of league tables which in essence commenced the Conservative government's introduction of choice and marketisation. Marketisation reproduces inequality through the publishing of league tables and results which in turn means that schools become selective and only want to recruit high achievers. This also means that parents' choice leads the system because they naturally want their child to attend the higher performing school in the league table (Ball and Whitty, 1998). However, not all children will be able to attend the higher performing school as there are a limited number of places in each school. In addition, the families with more money would have the opportunity to relocate to be closer to the higher performing schools and be able to take up the opportunity thus producing more inequality in society (Ball and Gewirtz, 1994).

Pre 1980s the government at the time aimed to reduce inequality and increase social mobility through education. The 1980s to 1990s saw an increase in neo-liberalism with a development towards competition and privatisation. However, this did not produce an open market for competition but instead an internal contrived market whereby traditional, hierarchy and order still combined with privatisation (Forrester and Garratt, 2016). Privatisation over the years has worked towards an increase in choice, membership and partnership for all stakeholders in the schools' community. This allowed these individuals more power and control in developing schools as a business and stakeholders being a market to whom the schools need to sell their product of providing an education (Zajda, 2006). Although based in Australia, the points made here by this author are very relevant to the developments of academies in England and the competition developed between academies to maintain and increase their intake each year ensuring that as a business they are financially viable.

Torjman (2005) categorises policy into four groups: substantive and administrative, vertical and horizontal, reactive and proactive and current and future. Substantive aspects reflect the community environment through legislation and the administrative part is the procedures which are developed to carry out the legislation which has been created. In vertical policy making, an organisation is responsible for the policy implementation. If there are two or more organisations which oversee their individual part of the policy, the horizontal policymaking will be used. In an in-house situation, if two teams have responsibility for the management of their parts of the policy then horizontal policy making could be present. Reactive policy making



occurs where the policy is created as a direct result of an event which has already taken place as opposed to proactive policy making where a conscious choice has been made to effect new initiatives. Current policymaking occurs when issues exist which are under review and are then changed through the creation of policy. Future policymaking is where canvassing is necessary for a policy to be passed and an issue needs to be highlighted to relevant bodies (Torjman, 2005). The information or situation regarding a particular context affects the development of that area of society and this is done by way of policy making. Therefore, where the policy is developed to respond to the situation or information, it is dependent upon the reliability of that particular information or situation. The need for 'the warrant to affirm the reliability or trustworthiness of the course of the information' is crucial to how the policy maker reacts to it (Dunn, 2016:345). When policy makers become complacent or delegate much of their work to sub-committees, there is a danger of losing their proactivity in creating policies and they very quickly and easily become reactive policy makers (Gerston, 2015).

The intersection of philanthropy and the government leads to making an impact through policy making (Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy, 2016). A definition of policy could be: making a definite decision resulting in the change of practice within a particular context. It is accepted that not all policies are implemented despite their creation and not all of them ultimately change practice but most endeavour to. There would be little point in creating a new policy which does not change practice because the previous policy would suffice if no change is required. However, sometimes new policies are developed to illustrate that something is being done, though they are merely repackaged older policies.

### **2.3 Analysing Policy**

Policy is a course of action which carries with it a purpose and that is followed by an individual or group of individuals to address a problem (Anderson, 2011). Therefore, policies can be classified into many categories and this is not the focus of the research. However, policies could be classified broadly into two groups: big and small policies. Big policies occur at different levels nationally and internationally. Policy can be shown in European and national government strategies. An example of this could be the national curriculum framework which reduced teacher control over what was taught and how it was taught (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). This is a national policy which is driven possibly by international standards created in an effort to match worldwide standards of education (Drury, 2013). National or regional policies are also created producing awarding bodies as levers across the country and regions. Small policies could be seen in schools, an example of which would be a school attendance policy (Sweasey, 2013). Small policy is often affected by big policy and in this case the attendance policy is driven by the Education Act 1996 (The National Archives, 1996). There are also policies which can be unwritten, but become policies as they are practised and constitute regulatory policies in professional behaviour; for example it may be a policy to offer a client a drink upon arrival at a business. This may not be written, but is expected and is practised. Individuals are regulated by policy and are often held to account when policy is relied upon to ensure that the requisite procedures are being undertaken. It could be argued, therefore, that any habitual practice in any setting could be defined as policy. Although it is debatable as to how many times a practice must be performed in order to qualify as a policy.

Policy analysis creates the setting for a better understanding and an improvement in practice. It is essential to appreciate historical and contextual situations to establish why a policy evolves as it does. Following an understanding of the policy, those concerned have freedom to make informed decisions about either following the said policy or campaigning to get it changed. The reason for policy analysis depends greatly on whether the researcher is approaching the analysis from a traditional or critical paradigm (Taylor and Medina, 2013). Researchers supporting the traditional paradigm would carry out policy analysis to identify the most efficient course of action to adopt in order to implement a decision or to achieve an objective. This would be done in order to bring about social improvement. The generation of

rational solutions to address social problems through the rigorous and value-free collection of information would be a priority in policy analysis. The coalition government claims that policy is based upon evidence and that it is not ideologically driven (DFE, 2012b). Therefore, it could be argued that it is classed as being culturally driven. However, there will always be those such as Gorard who wish to question whether policies are indeed evidence-based despite organisations such as the Education Policy Institute boasting its independent position and its use of evidence-based research to promote education (Gorard, 2007; Wilby, 2017, EPI, 2017). Academisation is not based upon evidence-based policy (Wrigley, 2011) as it is an experimental policy which extends the government of the time's neo-liberal approach to society with the increase in privatisation and decrease in public services. Academies epitomise the change in the political approach to the relationship between privatisation and the welfare state. The policy is founded upon the perhaps naive notion that a welfare state can no longer meet the demands of society and that it would be better entrusted to the private sector (Gleeson, 2011). Wrigley agrees with Gleeson and argues that, instigation of the neo-liberal policy is to introduce and develop academies which was brought about with no evidence to support the future success of such policy. He further notes that the policy was established under a desperate hope that allowing schools to be run by private individuals, who perhaps had ulterior motives, would result in a successful education system (Wrigley, 2011).

There are similarities between the traditional and critical paradigm. The critical paradigm seeks the understanding of a context in which policy arises and how it is used to legitimise its creation. One policy is often created and legitimised by saying that the previous policy did not work. There are so many Acts of Parliament which revoke former ones as a result of an enquiry or research highlighting a lack of provision created by a former Act and this can be seen by the numerous Education Acts. Researchers using the critical paradigm will wish to evaluate how policy processes are arranged and understand the values underpinning the policy and its effects (Creswell and Miller, 2000). There is a questioning undertone and doubt about neutrality of knowledge under the critical paradigm which seeks to investigate in whose interests the policy is developed and which parties are advantaged or disadvantaged by its creation. Researchers approaching policy analysis from this angle could question the basis for which the policy was created in the first place.

Policy can be analysed in a variety of ways and the ultimate decision will be affected by the researcher's positionality. Consideration should be given to the political and cultural circumstances which may affect the interpretation of the findings (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). When considering the power struggle in the development of policy 'one should not only look at the sponsors of the particular piece of legislation, but the interest groups and private entities affected by the legislation' (Gül, 2009:1). A study can be conducted by means of interviews with past and present policy makers, key people in policy production who may be civil servants or politicians. This is done in an effort to understand the formation of policy within the context of power relationships. It could be argued that those without power may be better suited in having an input into policy creation as they could be the people who would be affected by it. However, if they were to input into the policy creation they would continue to have power and so the vicious circle continues. It is perhaps therefore unavoidable to couple power with policy creation.

Ball (1993) suggests policy analysis as trajectory studies in an effort to understand and trace the path which the policy has taken and may take in its development. The question which can be explored is how the policy can go from its initial point to implementation. It is interesting to see how the policy develops from its drivers and is then implemented through its levers demonstrating how a national policy is able to affect everyday practice in various professions and in particular education. This will be discussed in a later chapter. An implementation study could be carried out as part of a trajectory study which would endeavour to question whether the policy works and what its effects are (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010).

There are various methods of policy analysis and a range of methods which can be used to analyse policies such as policy aims, context and the policy impact (Patton, 2013). A thematic and interrogative framework developed and evolved through literature has been established for this research project. It is important to establish the intricacies of the policy for this research and the catalyst for its inception.

## **2.4 The Academies Act 2010**

A White Paper (DFE, 2010) and various speeches were written about the academy programme prior to the passing of the Academies Act (The Guardian, 2005, The Telegraph, 2008, Gove, 2009). The White Paper was written during a time of political change. A coalition government had been formed and therefore, whilst it recognised the position of the Labour government and its goal to improve standards it developed the programme further reflecting the political stance of the coalition government with privatisation being the platform for the development of academies. It could be argued that all these documents were the government's policy documents about the academies programme. However, for the purposes of this research the Act itself is taken to be the government's policy.

The academy programme is governed by The Academies Act 2010. The Academies Act 2010 was passed through Parliament very quickly. Its first reading in the House of Lords was on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2010 and by 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010 it had been given Royal Assent with the Act coming into force on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010 (Parliament.Uk (2017)). Any school which either elects to convert to an academy or becomes an academy is governed by this policy document.

The Academies Act was referred to by the Queen when she said that

legislation will be introduced to enable more schools to achieve academy status and give them greater freedoms over the curriculum (Queen's Speech, 2010:1).

Local Authority maintained schools are invited by this policy to apply to become academies which means that they would no longer operate under Local Authority control. This would mean that the schools would have autonomy with regards to financial and academic decisions as opposed to the Local Authority making the decisions for them and they would 'take charge of their own destiny' (Coldron et al., 2014:391). This could be argued as the advent of 'the discipline of profit, through enterprise and entrepreneurship being used to neoliberalise public sector education from within and without (Ball, 2012a:24).

The literature shows that academies are implemented to improve the level of education in the UK (West, 2015, Eyles et al, 2016). The crux of the academies' policy is that schools will have more freedom to operate alone and to self-manage their institutions (West, 2015). Arguably, the breakdown of the hierarchy, the freedom to choose and the use of privatisation by academies demonstrates their neoliberal accordance (Forrester and Garratt, 2016).

The political mixture of the New Right consisting of neo-liberals with the introduction of competition, free market and tight control of public spending and the neo-conservatives with the support for hierarchy, traditions and social order meant an agreement regarding education policy would constitute a difficulty (Chitty, 2014). Ball argues that along with Thatcher's neo-liberalism came, privatisation and commercial elements imposed upon the public sector (2007a). The public sector started to become deregulated and competition and market forces were introduced. Entrepreneurialism produced the loss of dependency upon the state which had been prevalent in the past and led to the creation of the academies.

Academies are new schools which are publicly funded but under private enterprise leadership promising greater freedom and innovation than is currently available in maintained schools (Purcell, 2011). The concept of private enterprise influence is that the businesses may have had successful records in business and thus would bring that expertise to the sector of

education. The experience gained in the world of commerce is to be translated into the world of education but in conjunction with the state sector constraints. Private sponsors have at their disposal expertise and resources which may not necessarily be available to maintained schools (Larsen et al., 2011). The introduction of private enterprise into the state education system reflects the various systems abroad which have a similar model (Caldwell, 2011). It is argued by some that this is a neo-liberal policy (Wrigley, 2011). However, it may simply be a way to formalise a reaction to events of the past and deal with the downfalls of state education in a practical manner by responding to the needs of its customers (Caldwell, 2011).

According to Ball, academies are the promotion of competition and entrepreneurialism (2011). They have deconstructed the welfare state and reinvented public sector education with the divider between state and private sector becoming less defined. The actions which have traditionally been undertaken by the state have been taken over by the private sector between businesses or between the private sector and the state sector. The public sector has failed to respond to issues within education in the past and the private sector is perhaps able to provide responses. Business enterprises are used to analysing return upon investment and thus measuring outcomes in such a way. This is a notion particularly lacking in the state sector as this has not traditionally been a consideration for school leaders. The division between public and private sector provisions is no longer definite (Goldring and Mavrogordato, 2011). The private sector has influenced the public sector with competition and styles of management and measurement of outcomes (Hood, 1991) which has impacted upon education policy.

Policy is often created in a disorderly fashion, combining examples from other sources (which may or may not have been successful), using notions which may be fashionable, and hoping the policy may be successful as opposed to initiating a tried and tested approach. The competitive element of academies creates an environment in which a variety of options and opportunities are made possible which may not have been without the free market (Ball, 2007a). The government's reaction to the neo-liberal influences in society has been demonstrated in the education system as academies (Gunter, 2011). The change in the education system has resulted in schools becoming small businesses in their own right which are regulated by performance management (Gunter, 2011). The privatisation of education has meant that education is thrown into the market for competition to dictate (Harvey, 2007). According to Gunter the change in relationship between the status of state management and private organisations (with competition and market rivalry) is highlighted in the academies programme (2011). The academies programme has meant that education is extended into the open market as opposed to being suppressed within the state sector in an effort to create a variety of provisions for children (Ryan, 2008). Academies are classed as independent schools and therefore statutory provisions only apply to them if they are specifically detailed in the Act. They are run as private companies and thus as business enterprises under a contract with the Secretary of State (Wolfe, 2011).

The academies programme was originally based upon a blind hope that private enterprise had the expertise and integrity to make the programme successful. However, at the start there was no evidence for such neo-liberal policy yet the education system was transformed by this policy. The education system is being put under the control of unscrupulous beings who are only part of the academies programme to benefit themselves (Wrigley, 2011). The issue with the introduction of private enterprise is that one business is able to influence generations of young people in a locality due to the level of power or influence it gains within such locality (Elliott, 2011). Glatter argues that the academy programme is not part of a plan to revolutionise education instead it is a conscious political decision which is part of a larger political picture in which control from Local Authorities is becoming less significant (2011). This indicates that it cannot be presumed that academies will solve the issues within education nor that private enterprise can fulfil the role previously played by the state. Academies epitomise neo-liberalism with the introduction of competition, market forces, business approach to

management of staff, delivery of curriculum, new buildings and the learning environment and the reduction of Local Authority influence. Private enterprise can fail and if this occurs schools may have to be recovered by the re-nationalisation of the education system (Gunter, 2011). According to Rowley and Dyson critics of the programme question the motives of the private enterprises and doubt that the emphasis upon actions is being carried out for the benefit of the public interest (2011). However, schools have struggled for a number of years as maintained schools with poor outcomes and lack of resources which do not reflect the actions of leadership. The introduction of private enterprise propels competition which can be fierce and thus should develop high standards as each enterprise aims to provide a better product than the next to entice customers (parents) to choose their establishment within which to educate their children (Rowley and Dyson, 2011).

Any person may propose the establishment of new schools in any one area and as the doctrine of competition underpins academies, the best proposal is likely to be selected by the Local Authority (Wolfe, 2011). The governance of academies is made up of a mixture of state and private forces. Private forces are the entities carrying out the establishment of the academies and the service they provide. However, the state input still prevails as the academies are answerable to state enforced measures (Hatcher, 2011).

Currently administrative, financial and teaching and learning aspects of maintained schools are under Local Authority control and constraints. It is whether those in a position to make decisions are sufficiently secure in their own role and equipped to perform or whether decisions are made upon impulse (CIPFA, 2016). The wealth of a school measured by its performance, intake, finances and standing within the community determines whether a school would be a candidate for academisation (Coldron et al., 2014). If a school elects to become an academy, then a private company, (called an academy trust) which is created by a sponsor, will control it. S482 of the Education Act 1996 sets out this management aspect (The National Archives, 1996). It is stated that there will be greater power for academies to improve standards in schools through freedom of pay and conditions, length of the school day and year and curriculum which is delivered in schools (DFE, 2013). This assumes that the way for a school to raise standards is by academising. However, prior to the Academies Act many schools have improved by implementing support and improvement plans, and that these support and improvement plans could still help schools today. It could be argued that academisation is the government's way of relinquishing government responsibility thus making others accountable for performance both academically and financially (Curtis, et al, 2008, Montrose42, 2011).

It appears that the Academies Act is substantive, vertical, reactive and for the future (Torjman, 2005). This policy seems to be substantive as it is legislation which determines educational establishments across the country, affecting all communities. In addition to affecting schools, this policy could also impact upon universities and colleges because the education delivered in the earlier years of the educational process may determine the skills and interests at a later stage in a child's education. The government controls not only the policy creation but also its implementation and therefore this policy is horizontal and not vertical because it is the 'broad overarching policy [which] guides subsequent decisions throughout the organisation' (Smith, 2003: 11). Media articles have expressed concerns about the lack of quality of basic work skills and the poor international standing of children in the UK under the education system pre-academies programme where schools in the UK fall in global ranking (BBC news, 2010a, Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). The BBC is a government funded organisation even though it is paid for by the TV licences of the public. Consequently, this questions its objectivity and it could have a bias. Pupils in the UK do not find themselves on a level playing field when compared to pupils in other countries and this filters through the skills they lack when they reach adulthood (Kuczera et al., 2016). This provides an illustration that academisation is a

reactive policy which has been the result of media reports which have put pressure on the government to react to the education system and its shortfalls. Academisation is the Labour government's response to a potential crisis which has been highlighted and is its way of addressing the issue (Torjman, 2005).

A dramatic change in Britain's educational system has been brought about by the academies' programme. The most noticeable area of change is the removal of Local Authority control and the introduction of private enterprise, the rise of neoliberalism in public sector education. Academies are the government's portrayal of neo-liberal politics. Academisation has resulted in schools being managed as individual enterprises. Competition and school governance within the education market and the relationship between the two is demonstrated in academies (Gunter, 2011). Gove, the former Secretary of State for Education, instigated a range of changes including funding and content for Further Education. It appears that he may have faced an interesting dilemma as he instigated the decentralisation yet academies are the product of centralisation (Gove, 2009). They are accountable to the Secretary of State for Education, as opposed to Local Authorities (Richards, 2012). This appears to be a contradiction in terms and has not been fully thought through. The decentralisation of schools, as a result of a centralised action, is where the 'delegating of power and responsibility concerning the distribution and use of resources is by the central government to local schools' (Zajda, 2006:11). There is a release by central government and in turn local government of responsibility by the granting of autonomy to individual schools whereby the school governing body adopts legal responsibility for shaping decisions about finance, curriculum, human resources, premises and strategy – once the remit of local government (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017:8).

However, at the same time, the government has maintained control in terms of how schools are measured. This is not only a national measure of standards but is also aligned to the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development and the standards known as PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment which enables comparisons across countries.

PISA represents a commitment by the governments of OECD countries to monitor the outcomes of education systems in terms of student performance on a regular basis and within a common framework that is internationally accepted (OECD, 2004:3).

Schools which academise are still subject to the same Ofsted inspection regime as state maintained schools and are still expected to meet the same standards in terms of GCSE results as non-academy schools (Roberts, 2017). Academy schools are still subject to an 'inspection regime which was seen as a continuing threat to the school, its leaders and staff' (Rayner, 2017:7). Therefore, there is an inherent contradiction in that government releases control with one hand and retains it with the other in terms of the measure of outcomes and consequences for the schools if those outcomes are not satisfactory. Academies are granted the freedom to vary the school curriculum and use innovative teaching methods but at the same time they are restricted by the inspection regime which remains centralised. There appears to be tension between the decentralisation and the reservation of implicit control in the way schools are judged and the consequences if those judgements are not in line with expectations. The tension created by the decentralisation is between the aim to improve standards, grant greater autonomy for schools and the controlled measure of outcomes thus creating a 'real policy issue of finding the necessary balance between centralisation and decentralisation' (Zajda, 2006:11).

The academies' programme was much discussed by all political parties and contained in manifestos when canvassing for election (The Guardian, 2005a, The Telegraph, 2008, Gove, 2009). This suggests that this is a policy for the future for which politicians of whichever political persuasion have needed to canvass and bring to the attention of those affected by it.

Perhaps parties have become pre-occupied with the concept of academisation as opposed to concentrating on other elements of society which may be impacting upon the learning experience of today's young people.

Choice and freedom, aligning with a neoliberal perspective, are key elements in the Academies Act 2010 which carry different meanings and levels of importance and are manifested in various ways in each academy in relation to issues such as admissions (in particular, in relation to those with special educational needs), curriculum and exclusions. Choice, freedom and autonomy are terms which are all used in this study in the same way as they are in everyday language: choice being the possibility to elect one thing over and above another (Gorard, 2009); freedom being the ability and power to do as one wishes without constraints by external factors (West, 2015); and autonomy being the state of non-governance by an external body (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017). Language can be interpreted from varying perspectives as it can be interpreted in different ways by different people depending upon their positionality. They are all terms which can be loaded with given a person's particular viewpoint. This has to be considered when each government is offering any of these elements as to how the government at that particular time defines these terms. The inconsistency shown in relation to these key issues highlights the question of equality. Originally, parental choice was a key selling point for the academies' programme although due to the introduction of bureaucracy and regulations, which are preventing much of this freedom being exercised, it has left parents with choice as an illusion as opposed to having choice (TLTP Education, 2013). The lack of consultation when establishing an academy school has created much resistance from parents which ironically is the opposite of what academies advertise as one of their advantages which is to give parents more freedom. The governance and accountability are generally led by private sector sponsors and sponsor chains. Therefore, democracy is once again stifled. The private sector sponsors have little accountability to parents and lead with their own agendas. This then questions the influences such sponsors may have upon academies and whether this could be more of a hindrance than the advantage which is purported to be attached to the involvement of a sponsor and its added expertise (Gleeson, 2011). The notion of academies ensures that stakeholders have a choice albeit one that is constrained and regulated (Rayner, 2015). The initial selling point of parental choice has been quashed in some areas where parents have had the choice taken away from them and are being dictated to by the local academy trust as to where their children will be attending school (Mansell, 2016a). It could be argued that the concept of choice is now transferred to choice on the part of the academy sponsor as opposed to the parent. These decisions can be made without consultation and without sound reasoning and justification where

multi-academy trusts reverse a regime whereby schools are run by their local communities through elected organisations and makes them potentially the playthings of the people who set up the trusts, subject to approval by the secretary of state (Mansell, 2016a:1).

This question of equality and consistency possibly relates to the drivers for the policy which is discussed below.

The White Paper (DFE, 2016a) sets out to extend the academies' programme with all schools being forced to academise by 2022. The White Paper brings about a focus upon leadership and ensuring that talented leaders work in areas of underperformance. There is a large focus upon the development of school leaders and their progression through the ranks as opposed to pupils being the centre of attention and focus within the new policy (Dickens, 2016). There will be a period of grace (three years) from Ofsted inspections when a school academises, has a new head teacher or implements improvement plan strategies in order to entice leaders to work in those areas to reduce the level of pressure upon them as soon as they take on a role (DFE, 2016a, Riddell, 2016b). Along with the regulatory and administrative changes OFSTED will no longer hold its position to pass judgements with a grading upon the quality of a school and University schools of education will be unable to confer Qualified Teacher Status

(Husbands, 2016). When taking account of the longevity of England's reputation for university based teacher training it is interesting that White Paper proposes to lessen its involvement. If proposals suggested by Nicky Morgan Education Secretary at that time are implemented then there will be a change in teacher training and the way in which teachers are accredited; the Qualified Teacher Status will be replaced allowing people from various pathways outside the field to use their expertise in becoming a teacher; recruitment methods will change allowing schools to advertise on a national database and thus spend less on advertising (The Key for School Leaders, 2016). Schools will have the power to determine when a trainee teacher is accredited. Given the issue of funding, it would not always be in a school's best financial interests to sign off a trainee. By signing off a trainee it would need to pay a higher salary and therefore, it would be better for the school to know that the trainee was of a sufficiently high standard to be signed off and yet keep him or her on the lower salary of a trainee. Therefore, this system of accreditation would appear to be flawed, biased and potentially financially motivated (ATL, 2016). This deregularisation and neoliberal approach highlights the level of autonomy for an individual academy and the opportunity to manipulate the training system for its own financial gain when there is no independent body assessing the standards. MATs may have their headquarters far from the individual school. Therefore, an air of remoteness is created which could be seen, for some schools, as repeating the already existing distant relationship with the local authority or in some circumstances, creating a more remote relationship than a school already has with the local authority (Riddell, 2016b). Therefore, perhaps the MATs are to become the new version of the local authority (Wilkins, 2017). There have been financial cuts for the local authority and therefore, according to Riddell (2016b), if the planned academisation of all schools does not proceed and schools are left to be local authority maintained then schools could be in a worse position, having an insecure future.

The Academies Act 2010 addresses various areas of the academisation process and is centred on the Funding Agreement. Therefore, it is important at this stage to explore this key document further to contextualise the level of inconsistency and credibility of the policy in order to set the scene for later discussion.

The Funding Agreement is a contract formed between the government and the sponsor demonstrating the government's control over the academy (West, 2015). This agreement contains the terms for the creation of the academy; in particular referring to systems, processes and operations. Prima facie, if every academy has to be a party to a Funding Agreement then this should allow for stability and consistency across all academies. Therefore, an individual who has not researched the area would presume that two academies located next to each other would both have the same Funding Agreement and consequently would be bound by the same terms. However, this is not necessarily the case.

Although the agreements were, to some extent, based on the agreements which had been used for City Technology Colleges, there was a wide variation, particularly when it came to the sections (generally annexes to the main agreement) dealing with matters such as admissions, exclusions, SEN, religious education (RE) and the curriculum (Wolfe, 2011: 24).

Despite all academies being formed under the same policy document, it would seem that there is room for negotiation and individuality between academies. The flexibility is apparent as academies are able to choose to employ teachers who do not have QTS (Mulholland, 2012). This seems to be a situation where academies can choose terms and conditions as opposed to being standardised (EDEXEC, 2012). This therefore questions whether the freedom of power under the policy produces an equitable system. This flexibility could mean that all pupils, irrespective of which school they attend, may not receive a similar education in terms of standard, quality and content allowing them to compete nationally against each other.

The disparity between agreements prompted the creation of a Model Funding Agreement by the DFE (DFE, 2015e). This Model Funding Agreement was supposed to eliminate inequality



and create consistency across academies because all academies would have an example to follow. However, due to litigation and political influences, the Model Funding Agreements appear to have been changing over a period of time. Therefore, the desired effect does not appear to have been achieved. Still no current model is in existence and there is thus a lack of consistency and what remains is a model which allows for flexibility. There is the argument that this is appropriate and caters for the individual needs of academies in their particular environment. However, if this situation is allowed to continue then pupils could fail to be educated in an environment which facilitates such an education, where pupils should be prepared for competition, not only within the school environment but also with other pupils for places in further education and the workplace. This flexibility could therefore cause inconsistency of standards and this is an area which the introduction of the Academies Act was created to eradicate, but instead an unbalance exists.

The major skills required today are to prepare pupils for employability. There is a place for becoming an educated, well-rounded person who is able to adapt to a variety of situations and circumstances and these skills would of course enhance pupils' job prospects. However, if pupils only have these attributes and do not have the requisite qualifications and work-based skills for employability, they could be disadvantaged. Pupils on the one hand, when applying for jobs or higher education places, are being measured against the same criteria with no allowance for their background but on the other hand are not all being prepared in the same way. It is accepted that all pupils have different abilities, come from different backgrounds and will have different aspirations but it is questionable whether the education system is being fair to them where there is a lack of consistency in education provision. It would be preferable if the Model Funding Agreement was consistent to offer fair choice to all. In addition, it is necessary for the aims and objectives of each and every Funding Agreement to be couched in the same terms and with the same conditions for all academies in an effort to create fairness and equal opportunities for all pupils across the country.

## **2.5 The Drive for the Academies Act 2010**

In order to establish the drive for the Academies Act it is necessary to understand the notion of policy drivers. I focus upon what the drivers are, as opposed to emphasising the quality of the drivers. Therefore, stage one, initiation and the quality of the change vehicle, of Fullan's change theory is not appropriate here (Fullan, 2007). In a further study it may be appropriate to consider the quality of the Academies Act as the vehicle for change. However, I decided to focus upon the drivers for the vehicle. There are two definitions of policy drivers which could be helpful. Education reform is nationally or internationally pushed using the policy's intention or aim through a clear decision of which there are different consequences for stakeholders at all levels (Nixon et al., 2008). A difference between policy drivers and levers can be distinctly established (Steer et al., 2007). Policy drivers are aims or targets of the policy used by both governmental and non-governmental bodies to cover areas such as public services causing an immediate response from a number of stakeholders (Steer et al., 2007). It is suggested that policy can be used as a way to remain in power or to maintain control. Official documents and statements may be used as the vehicles to portray policies. Policy drivers act as a setting and structure within which policy levers are established. In order to effect a policy driver, it is necessary to have mechanisms and systems which are the policy levers (Steer et al., 2007). The driver establishes a purpose and the lever effects the purpose through a particular mode. An example of this would be the notion of "Every Child Matters". "Every Child Matters" was published as a result of Lord Laming's report following the death of Victoria Climbié (DFE, 2004). This is used as an example as the focus has developed whereby British values and the unseen child is now a focus in society and schools (DFE, 2014c, Ofsted 2013). The circumstances surrounding her death and the failure of the children's services system could constitute a driver for the policy. However, a more sceptical view would be that the Labour government felt that it needed to react following her death and the political driver would be to maintain power at the next election. In order to do this it was necessary to show that it was

taking Lord Laming's report and the shortcomings in the system seriously by way of the creation of a reactive policy. Arguably this aligns with the Academies Act which was introduced to react to the underperformance in schools (Machin and Veroit, 2010).

The actual policy following the Victoria Climbié case is the Children Act 2004 (The National Archives, 2004). This uses the Every Child Matters initiative and programme along with the government papers produced in connection with it. It stipulates how young people up to the age of 19 (or 24 for those with disabilities) will be dealt with and these frameworks constitute the lever for the policy. Policy change is initiated by a policy driver which is the catalyst for the change then reflected in the policy's environment at the time of creation.

A detailed analysis of the various political approaches towards the drivers for the Academies Act is deliberately limited as this is not a focus of the study. However, I believe it is important to include a brief outline of two key political parties in order to set the scene. The policy drivers for Tony Blair's government and that of the Coalition did not appear to be the same. This difference in drivers may have subconsciously affected the stakeholder's perceptions. This is not explored in this thesis but perhaps could be an area of further study following the findings of this research. Tony Blair's government focuses upon standards, choice and inclusion of parents in the White Paper (House of Commons Education Committee, 2006). Close analysis of this Paper shows that the education reform that had previously taken place was dubious and thus the gap left by this became the justification for further reform. Parental inclusion in decision-making for children increased which links with the element of choice being interchanged with the use of the word freedom both for parents and schools. Challenge is used by Tony Blair in the White Paper but with differing connotations. Schools can be categorised or labelled as challenging or underperforming (Daniels, 2011). Additionally, challenge may be necessary in order to address the falling standards across schools in England. I appreciate that there are explicit factors and implicit factors regarding the political agenda to introduce academies. Explicitly, it would appear that there was a desperate need to improve standards and academies were seen as a vehicle through which to achieve this. Implicitly, there was parental dissatisfaction fuelled by the underperformance of schools and there was a need to have more parental input. The introduction of more parental choice may have a negative effect and increase disadvantage among communities (Gewirtz et al, 1994). In 2010, Michael Gove, the coalition government's Education Secretary, continued with the idea of academies but with a different slant. The coalition government gave recognition to the need for the improvement of standards highlighted by press exposure and a comparison of standards in England to those in the international field. However, privatisation and increased autonomy for schools, allowing control of employees and pay and conditions, played an intrinsic part of the decision-making and development of the policy (DFE, 2012b). This financial aspect complemented the other factor in decision-making which was that of financial gain for academies when converting to an academy and in turn gain for local authorities who would relinquish responsibility for distribution of funds (Barkham and Curtis, 2010). A stakeholder's political persuasion may have an effect upon what he or she believes the aim of the Academies Act to have been and in which area his or her priorities lie.

Privatisation is perceived as having more influence across the world. Endogenous privatisation occurs where the state system is dismantled and influenced by the ideas and practices of the public sector and the world of business (Ball and Youdell, 2007). The policy makers use 'practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more like business' (Ball and Youdell, 2007:8). These are views from researchers from within education establishments as opposed to those driving policy within a government department. Neo-liberalism is where conditions are created within which competition and entrepreneurialism are possible (Barry et al, 2005). Competition is an integral part of schools becoming privatised and steers their development (Harvey, 2007). Under neo-liberal practice the state relinquishes its responsibility, releasing services on to the open market where everything has a value and can be bought or sold (Hill and Kumar, 2012). This means that the government has minimal

input and gives the private sector the freedom to operate (Turner and Yolcu, 2014). The dismantling of state led education creates a system of education which is organised by itself and is the author of its own destiny with greater flexibility (Woods, 2011, Ball, 2012b). However, it depends upon those in charge of using the flexibility as to how successful the dismantling of the state led education system becomes. Another viewpoint is that the neo-liberal shift towards the school system is a consequence of a political shift as opposed to an educational one because there is no logic to conclude that a school will perform better if its leadership, governance and finances are changed (Gunter, 2011). Gunter further argues that the government's reaction to the neo-liberal influences in society has been demonstrated in the education system as academies. The dismantling of the state led system producing a state funded private system produces 'hierarchical differentiation which is the consequence of experiments with choice' (Hill and Kumar, 2012:118). The dismantling of the state led education system emphasises the destruction of a structured system and a breakdown in the structure of relationships of power cascading from government (Gunter and Forrester, 2010). The position that privatisation is experimental as opposed to being a positive development for education is from researchers who are part of the Institute for Education Policy Studies which is a radically left organisation. Therefore, it is clear to see why they would be of the view that a privatised system is a mere experiment with the education system.

The setting for policy drivers and the policy environment upon its inception is always worth considering. For example, it is possible to compare two organisations, governments, or countries, which follow the same policy, but the drivers at the time of the policy creation could be completely different. Each government could demonstrate different drivers for the same policy. The Labour government's drivers for the Academies Act may differ from those of the coalition government's drivers when they made the decision to continue and expand the policy further. However, the drivers for the Labour party may not be the same as those for the coalition government given that the parties support differing political angles and agendas.

The idea of academies in the UK dates back to the power of the Labour government with Tony Blair as Prime Minister when 'A programme of City Academies' was announced by the Secretary of State for Education in 2000 (Gorard, 2009). David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education at the time, outlined the purpose of academies as

in some of the most challenging areas, we believe a more radical approach is needed. Over the next year, we intend to launch pathfinder projects for new City Academies. These Academies, to replace seriously failing schools, will be built and managed by partnerships involving the Government, voluntary, church, and business sponsors. They will offer a real challenge and improvements in pupil performance, for example through innovative approaches to management, governance, teaching and the curriculum, including a specialist focus in at least one curriculum area (Blunkett, 2000, Curtis et al., 2008: 12).

A poor system of schooling, where opportunity and disadvantage have been prevalent, has caused too many children to be failed (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). Therefore, the notion of City Academies was to provide opportunities, in particular in relation to the business sector, to change the pattern for those children who were stuck in a cycle and there appeared to be little chance to improve their lives. It is claimed that the development of opportunities for pupils is enhanced in academies in which the private sector is able to nurture them as opposed to the public sector which lacks capacity for such expansion (Ryan, 2008).

A focus upon disadvantaged backgrounds appears to be a driver in an effort 'to provide improved education for students from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds' (Gorard, 2009: 102). The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) appeared to support this with the aim to

raise achievement in areas of historic underperformance. City Academies are all-ability schools with the capacity to transform the education of children in areas of disadvantage and need (DfEE, 2001: 49).

Originally, it would seem that the driver which was explicitly shared as part of party manifestos was to improve standards but only in disadvantaged or underperforming schools; not in all schools (Gunter, 2011). This singles out failing schools and uses funding to financially support education in these settings as opposed to supporting education nationwide. This financial support had not been available prior to the Academies Act because failing schools could not access certain funds which were available for specialist schools. Therefore, this situation 'exacerbated the existing competitive disadvantages for so-called 'failing schools' (Gorard, 2009: 101). This highlights the gulf between high-performing and underperforming schools, and privileged and disadvantaged areas, creating an unequal education system where the 'weaker would get weaker and the strong stronger' (Coldron et al., 2014:399). Those schools already with more privileges could have more access to networks thus enhancing their already advantaged position (Coldron et al., 2014). It would seem that the governments have adopted a 'one-size-fits-all' rule without taking into account the individuality of both schools and pupils alike. The issue of unfairness and inequality is a theme which appears to run across many aspects of the Academies Act noted above.

It would appear that, through the media, hope was pinned upon a mix of innovative measures to 'drive up the educational attainment' in schools (Machin and Veroit, 2010: 19). With this in mind, a u-turn has occurred where

the new coalition government has written to all Head Teachers asking if they are interested in Academy status, to which 1560 schools have responded positively (Machin and Veroit, 2010:1).

There appears to have been a noticeable shift from the main driver (which was to raise standards in disadvantaged areas) to opening up the invitation to elect to be a converter academy regardless of the achievement or deprivation of the school. A converter academy is a high-performing school which chooses to have autonomy and be free from Local Authority governance (New Schools Network, 2015). Therefore, it could be argued that the main driver was not to raise standards but perhaps rather an ulterior motive for removing government accountability. According to Curtis et al. (2008:6) 'a distinguishing aspect of academy schools can be seen as their independence from the local authority'. Academies are establishments which are funded by the state and yet are held out to be independent each with their own ethos and structures which change depending upon the sponsor, locality and demographic area. Academies are not accountable to local authority as are maintained schools but instead have their own accountability structures but with the financial support from government (Gleeson, 2011). This situation may have produced a potential risk in that the situation could 'exacerbate already existing educational inequalities' (Machin and Veroit, 2010:1) if already outstanding schools are in a position where they could be given the additional help that underperforming schools would have originally received. This could widen the existing gap between privileged and disadvantaged schools.

The introduction of academies under the Labour government consisted of a devolvement of powers. The relationship between central government, local government and education institutions reformed dramatically (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). The role of the Local Authority was diminished with the financial, managerial and academic responsibility falling with the academy sponsor, thus dramatically changing how the Local Authority fits into the education sector in the UK (Montrose42, 2011). However, the Local Authority now needs to change its role in engaging with academy sponsors in a collaborative way. The Local Authority is no longer the steering force for all schools under its governance. Therefore, the Local Authority is freed from its financial burden in relation to those schools which academise and this could be a further policy driver (Stewart, 2013). In addition to this, the Local Authority

would also have no accountability for the performance and standards of schools in its borough which academise. The introduction of private sponsorship into the education system means that one individual or organisation is in a position of great influence over a large number of young people in one particular area. This may have an effect on the future shaping of a particular locality (Elliott, 2011). This may have a negative or positive impact depending upon the motive of the sponsor.

The notion exists that the academy sponsor was promoted on the basis that the sponsor would have expertise and experience in particular areas and would therefore be able to make an impact upon the needs of individual schools (DFE, 2014b). While the added dimension provided by sponsors and the potential support for schools in terms of finance and business aspects is valuable, it is difficult to understand how this could be a replacement for qualified educators and government educational advisors being in a driving position. Academy sponsors may originate from a variety of backgrounds including business, industry, colleges and universities. These sponsors carry many attributes to offer to academies in terms of financial, managerial and entrepreneurial support and experience.

Nevertheless, the improvement of underperforming schools is not solely based upon curriculum and league tables. The introduction of resources and innovative management skills together with an objective overview of an organisation carry their merits on the road to school improvement (Freedman, 2010). There is an expectation therefore that the sponsor would have the ability to assess the school's background and to analyse the reasons why the school is underperforming. It could be argued that despite the quality of the sponsor's attributes they may not be useful in the field of education unless the sponsor also has expertise in education.

However, another driving force for the introduction of sponsors to schools may have been that the sponsors would have a vested interest and would therefore aim to introduce measures to address issues for their own benefit as well as the benefit of the underperforming school. This business drive is not apparent in the Local Authority maintained schools and may be a reason why so many underperforming schools exist due to this lack of vested interest in the improvement of schools (Machin and Vernoit, 2010). For some time the public sector has been unable to meet the needs of pupils which has resulted in a failing education system. Private enterprise has the opportunity, capacity and experience to approach education in an alternative manner which has not been exploited by the public sector. Therefore, as an alternative, if the public sector method is not working, then the private sector may be in a better position to respond to the current issues and improve the system (Goldring and Mavrogordato, 2011). Alternatively, it could be argued that sponsors may have too much of a vested interest. Sponsors could have too much power to shape the curriculum thus selecting pathways for pupils as opposed to giving them a broad curriculum from which they are able to choose their future pathway.

By January 2011, there were at least 2600 academies with more set to gain academy status (DFE, 2013). The government produced its analysis of the 2012 GCSE results in which the results were shown in such a light that academy schools are more successful than Local Authority maintained schools and 'sponsored academies continue to drive up standards at a faster rate than state-funded schools' (DFE, 2013: 23). Clearly government sources would find it necessary to present data in such a light. However, Richard Hatcher opposes the notion that academies achieve better than local authority maintained schools. He is a member of the Anti-Academies Alliance which consists of unions, parents, pupils, teachers, councillors and members of parliament. The Alliance takes the stance that there is no data to support the link between academisation and improvement of standards and attainment. Therefore, why should schools be forced to academise (Anti-academies Alliance, 2012). Riddell, (2016a) purports that inequality is addressed more successfully in academies than in Local Authority maintained schools. These figures are not based upon an analysis of comparing like for like

schools. However, this does not necessarily appear to be the case when similar schools are compared. In fact, there is little difference and in some circumstances academy schools do not achieve as well as Local Authority maintained schools (Stewart, 2013). This then questions the true benefit of academy schools and whether the real driver is to improve schools or whether there is a hidden financial or political agenda due to the future potential savings (DFE, 2012a). This could be the start of the disappearance of Local Authority control and the introduction of even more privatisation. It could also be argued that this is a money-saving exercise on the part of the government to shed even more Local Authority jobs thus creating huge financial savings.

The coalition government does not hold the same driver with regards to Local Authority control as it has allowed the Local Authority to be a co-sponsor and has made provision for the Local Authority to be consulted upon negotiation of new funding agreements (Curtis et al., 2008). It would therefore be incongruous to say that the removal of Local Authority control is a driver for the coalition government as it has re-introduced the Local Authority involvement. There may be two reasons why the coalition government has re-introduced the Local Authority involvement. First, some of the willing sponsors have little or no expertise in the field of education and would therefore struggle to fulfil the role satisfactorily and so it can be argued that it is a way of justifying the venture to those who purport the sponsors know very little about the school education system (Chitty, 2008). This independent research expresses the practical effects of the inappropriateness of the mechanism. Secondly, there are insufficient sponsors and therefore the Local Authority is being reintroduced to fill the void of sponsors (Ball, 2008). It would seem that the two policy drivers which were attributed to the Labour government no longer exist for the coalition government. This therefore questions why the coalition government continued with the introduction and passing of the Academies Act 2010 as an Act of Parliament.

The position of UK schools and its global standing across the world with regards to education would appear to be a policy driver. 'Unless we act now our children will lose out in the global race for knowledge' (Gove, 2010: 1). Raising standards continues to be a focus but it has a slightly different slant. The coalition government has been under threat from newspapers such as *The Guardian* which underlines Britain's global slippage and the need to initiate the academies' programme in an effort to improve standards nationwide (Shepherd, 2010).

Implicit drivers also play a role in this. Privatisation allows the workforce and pay and conditions to be dictated by sponsors. There could be a positive and negative effect to the privatisation of schools. Wages could be low so that profits are increased or the wages could be higher in order to attract better-qualified staff in an effort to improve standards. Schools could be under threat in the future and therefore some schools believe that by being a converter academy they will gain financially and protect the resource provision thus keeping them in a position to increase standards (Russell, 2011). This could be considered as an implicit driver when schools elect to become an academy. A school's intake could be under revision if electing to become an academy as it is able to select 10% of its intake based upon pupils' aptitude (Gorard, 2009). The implicit driver of social mobility may be connected to this as an academy may use a covert selection process for admissions (Gunter, 2011). Pupils from underperforming areas would be able to choose to attend a better performing school but it would be up to the individual school's selection process to decide whether or not the pupils met the school's criteria. Those schools which are already better performing would probably argue that pupils from underperforming areas attending better performing schools could have a negative impact socially and academically upon the performance of other pupils.

These implicit drivers existed during the Labour government and there does not appear to be any drastic change. The major changes have occurred with regards to the explicit drivers showing that both governments were steered by different priorities yet both governments have ultimately joined their reasoning which has resulted in the production of the same lever, namely the Academies Act which is used as the vehicle to effect the policy.

The Academies Act 2010 covers a vast array of issues and topics which affect the running of schools. The contents of the Act affect various stakeholders such as pupils, parents, teachers, school staff, politicians and the media in the way in which events and developments concerning academies are reported. Therefore, it would be unmanageable in this research to address all of these areas in detail and that is why this literature review has focused upon the drivers and possible levers of the Academies Act 2010 rather than to discuss a wide number of issues only briefly. As a result of the literature review, the study aimed to address the following research questions.

## **2.6 Research Questions**

1. What are education stakeholders' perceptions of the aims of the Academies Act 2010?
  - a) What are the views of education stakeholders with regards to the role of academisation and raising standards?
  - b) What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding the aims of the Academies Act?
2. What are the lived experiences of stakeholders who have been in a school whilst it has gone through academisation?
  - a) What is the financial impact on the school?
  - b) What is the impact upon decision-making, vision and ethos?

## **2.7 Summary**

The concept and practice of policy making emerges from complex understanding of social, emotional, financial and political elements of society. As can be seen from the literature reviewed here it is not as clear as assuming that policy such as the Academies Act 2010 is attributed to the one person who at the time of the passing of the Act is in a position of responsibility with the label Secretary of State for Education. There are many underlying forces, events and political pressures which have led to the passing of the Academies Act 2010 which may not be immediately evident from reading the Act.

An understanding of the attributes of what policy entails and the varying ways in which policy can be portrayed has established a greater understanding that there is more to a policy than the written form of the policy. There is more to policy than an Act of Parliament in that a policy may be created long before it reaches the point of an Act. The knowledge concerning policy formation has allowed the researcher to present the political happenings at the time of the policy creation.

The Academies Act 2010 covers a vast array of issues and topics which affect the running of schools for example curriculum, pay and conditions, school administration to mention but a few. The contents of the Act affect various stakeholders such as pupils, parents, teachers, school staff, politicians and the media in the way that events and developments concerning academies are reported. Therefore, it would be unmanageable in a thesis to address all of these areas in detail and that is why I decided to focus upon the areas contained within the research questions rather than cover a wide number of issues in little detail.

## **Chapter Three: Research Design**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Research must be 'original, significant, non-trivial, relevant, topical, interesting to a wider audience and to advance the field' (Cohen et al., 2011:106). To this end it was important to me that I chose a topic to which I was able to easily relate and to fill a gap in the literature. According to Mortimore the aim of research is to make observations, record information with systems in place to do this, produce an analysis of the data and then draw inferences from the findings which are then of a quality to be published for wider consumption ultimately making a difference and improving the field of research (Mortimore, 2010). Therefore, I maintained this notion when starting to consider the formulation of the research questions and whether my research would fulfil these requirements.

The research questions relating to this project were formulated over a period of time and have consequently developed as a direct result of the literature review and my work in an education setting as a teacher. As part of my employment I have completed the National College Leadership courses which have allowed me access to a wide number of schools where conversion has taken place and where colleagues have discussed their experiences of academisation. This has thus propelled my interest even more in this developing area of research.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

I considered Michael Fullan's change theory focusing upon how individuals involved in an act of change react and deal with the change instrument (Fullan, 2007). Fullan's four stage process of initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome were not as an entire package appropriate to the focus of the study. I acknowledged the value of his theory and the key elements of motivation, capacity building, learning in the context of the location of change, changing the location, reflective action, engagement at different levels of stakeholders and persistence and flexibility of those involved (Fullan, 2006). Fullan highlights the importance of coping mechanisms used to deal with the effects of change (Fullan, 2015). Stage two of the theory, implementation, considers how the change has been adopted by those involved. This differs from the focus of the current study, which analyses in depth the viewpoints of the stakeholders not simply on what has been implemented but instead its effects upon the stakeholders. My focus was upon the stakeholders' personal perceptions of the changes they saw and their lived experiences resulting from the change. Stage three of Fullan's theory continuation was relevant (Fullan, 2007). This stage relates to how the change has been reacted to by those affected. This is relevant for the stakeholders to express their views regarding how their surrounding environments have filtered the change into daily practice and whether it is viewed as having a sustainable impact. Fullan also focuses upon moral purpose and the management of change (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2017). This lays emphasis on ensuring change is effectively implemented by all those involved, working for a common goal. This is not a focus of the current study but could be a further development of the research for a future project.

A number of qualitative research approaches were considered for the current study. Action research is a study which is cyclical in nature, in which action is combined with reflection upon the research topic which is then used to understand, inform and improve future practice (Hopkins (1985). Action research is often used to solve problems, is collaborative, can enhance the work of participants, allows records of change in activities to be kept and aims to understand a social context (Kemmis et al., 2013). Ethnography is the observation of activities together with the identification of patterns within the participants' activities in which the researcher also participates (Brewer, 2000). I did not use action research or ethnography because in this instance neither was appropriate. It was beyond the scope of the study to do



ethnographic research because it would have meant extended contact with participants over long periods of time and that would not have been practical. I did not want to observe participants in their environment and develop a catalogue of evidence of practice. Instead I wanted to understand the impact of academisation on individual participants and their interpretation of the policy in relation to their school and roles.

I therefore decided that a case study was a more appropriate approach as it enabled me to address the stakeholders' perspectives and the reasons for their opinions at a particular point in time. In this research, a case study was selected to demonstrate the differing perspectives within a number of academies. A case study captures a specific instance (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). It allows real people in real situations to demonstrate their perspectives. The use of case study has allowed me to analyse the perspectives shared by identifying common themes as opposed to using pure numerical analysis listing the frequency of the usage of particular words. The context of participants can affect the views which are shared and thus a case study allowed me to compare not only the individual perspectives of the stakeholders within one school but also to make a comparison inter-school. Case studies are defined by the subject being studied as opposed to the way in which it is being investigated (Hitchcock and Hughes (1995). Furthermore, case studies allow the researcher to clearly examine the roles of the research participants and show how this may have impacted upon the participants. A case study enables the reader to empathise with the stakeholders and appreciate the happenings within their setting as the parameters and stakeholders of the study are clearly defined (Geertz, 1973). Subjectivity and objectivity are both combined within a case study as the stakeholders are expressing their lived experiences whilst at the same time the researcher is trying to objectively analyse the data which is in itself subjective.

Three types of case study are in existence (Yin, 2013). These three types are exploratory, which is where the case study is carried out as a pilot for further research; descriptive, where events are narrated; and explanatory, in which theories are tested (Yin, 1984). Each of these case studies have a specific role to play whether it be to test hypotheses, act as observational tools to assist in triangulation with other methodologies, or to create generalisations. However, I acknowledge that there must be caution when making generalisations where only a small case study has been undertaken. Case study is also used to examine the impact of large-scale national policy at an individual level in schools (see Ball, 1993).

In this study it was important to investigate the experiences of stakeholders who could be potentially feeling the impact, at varying degrees and in a variety of ways, of the national policy on academies. Therefore, in order to produce research of worth, a case study was chosen to discover the experiences of a smaller number of participants in depth as opposed to unveiling numerical data of a larger number of stakeholders which could not be analysed to find the meaning and reasoning behind the findings. In this instance, a descriptive case study was chosen to give more depth to the research revealing the reason behind participants' responses together with the use of some triangulation.

A case study provides a very detailed picture of an individual, an organization, a particular programme, a school, or other entity focusing upon one organisation or group and then an in-depth research study is produced (Nath, 2005). The group in this study was a small number of academies in which an in-depth study was carried out and then the findings were considered in the light of the national policy.

### **3.3 Ontology, Epistemology and Paradigm**

Ontological assumptions are based upon the perception of social reality and the existence of knowledge. How does the researcher view the world? A researcher's ontology will determine whether reality is external or internal to its individuals. This constitutes the nominalist and realist debate. Nominalist being the view that objects are not independent of individuals. The realist view is that objects exist independently of individuals (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). A

researcher's ontology will affect his or her beliefs or value system. Ontology is affected by positionality in terms of how the world is socially viewed and what is in existence and what is not. The researcher's perception of the world will shape his or her view of reality and knowledge. The researcher's assumptions with regards to ontology and epistemology affect strongly the choice of the researcher in terms of method and methodology used in research (Wellington et al., 2005).

A researcher's ontological stance is how a researcher believes knowledge to be gained. The positivist approach is that knowledge is objective and is a tangible notion. However, the interpretative approach is that knowledge is subjective and individual (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Epistemological assumptions are connected with the acceptable methods used to prove the knowledge and how this is then conveyed to others (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Therefore, the way in which a researcher gains knowledge will affect his or her positionality. Positionality will affect the researcher's epistemology in so far as what constitutes knowledge and how it is gained and communicated to others and his or her appreciation of reality.

A paradigm is the structure or format used to order values and beliefs which ultimately shape the research design (Bosit, 2010). The perception of social reality stems from two main paradigms that of positivism and interpretivism which are both affected by the ontological and epistemological assumptions made. Both paradigms can be combined but this was not appropriate for this study. An individual's definition and understanding of reality will be shaped by values or a belief system which produce a researcher's particular stance with regards to ontological and epistemological assumptions and which consequently affect a researcher's paradigm and positionality when considering a concept (Sikes, 2004).

The main distinction to be made between the two paradigms is the basis of inclusion of the individual and appreciation of experience and prior knowledge and alternatively the aim to achieve total anonymity and goal to be person-free. The positivist paradigm centres itself around science and concretism and measurability. The interpretative paradigm is at the other end of the spectrum and relates to an individual's experiences and thoughts in relation to the surrounding environment (Sikes, 2004). This accords most appropriately with the research questions of this study. Paradigms influence strategy and interpretation of reality (Poni, 2014). The paradigm guides the research which is influenced by a researcher's ontology and epistemology. An individual's outlook upon the existence of reality and knowledge is shaped by an individual's perception of the world.

According to Douglas the positivist paradigm centres around two essential elements: rules dictate how an individual behaves and conducts him or herself and scientific methods are used to explore such behaviour (Douglas, 1973). This definition endeavours to remove the researcher from the equation and removes the possibility of past experience affecting either the subject of the research or the researcher. Therefore, the knowledge that is in existence is unknown to the individual. The focus of this paradigm is the use of numbers and the ability to make generalised conclusions (Bell, 2006). This paradigm is based upon the scientific method which

necessarily involves standards and procedures for demonstrating the empirical warrant of its findings, showing the match or fit between its statements and what is happening or has happened in the world (Cuff and Payne, 1979:4).

There is great reliance on the repeatability of research by other researchers, variables are cut to a minimum and ultimately it appears that research has enhanced credibility as being valid with the aim of testing theories and hypotheses to enable further predictions in the particular field of research. The individual has no place in this paradigm and the research is depersonalised.

Nevertheless, it is contradictory to say that the human element of research can be removed when researching human behaviour. The principle of the scientific method could prove to be problematic. There is perhaps a mistaken belief that all personnel within science conform to a certain scientific method and therefore this is the method being proposed to achieve educational research. If such a method is an arbitrary notion, how can it be used as a springboard for other concepts? Kuhn (1996) recognises the lack of existence of scientific method and bases his work around incommensurability which is a mathematical term meaning the lack of common measure. Kuhn argues that based upon two facts, there cannot be a scientific statement which purports to be wholly objectively true. Each scientist is an individual and no two individuals are the same simply by definition and, therefore, such is the case in relation to scientific method.

In the interpretative paradigm the individual is the pivotal point and this paradigm is clearly subjective per se. I favour the interpretative paradigm and my positionality colours my viewpoint and approach to issues. It is difficult for research to be value-free as research is usually carried out with a moral undertone (Fraser et al., 2004). This approach is focused upon perceptions and individuals (Poni, 2014). There is no anonymity of experience and instead this experience and personality are used to create the research. Therefore, the researcher's positionality may greatly affect the way in which research is presented and thus the importance of its inclusion in a study is paramount. The argument that all human behaviour can be pigeonholed through the use of laws, theories, generalisations and predictions is strongly refuted under the interpretative paradigm. How can a generic law be created to dictate the behaviour of other 'individuals' as they themselves are also individuals? It is essential to look behind the obvious and examine the individual to ascertain intention behind behaviour and effect of experience. Choices made determine the next stage in life. In order to create an understanding of the behaviour it must be contextualised in the light of surrounding circumstances past, present and future. This is a personal and individualised concept and cannot resort to the use of the positivist paradigm which makes generalisations about each individual's personal choice. How can a generalisation be made about an individual? Patterns and relationships between variables are created for generalisation in so far as the constraints of the setting allow (Gray, 2004).

### **3.4 Positionality**

Ontological and epistemological assumptions affect a researcher's positionality which in turn determines the methodology and methods used in research. Prima facie, I fail to see how an individual's statement can be made without such individual's position tainting the perception. It is difficult to appreciate how previous experience or knowledge cannot have an effect on such perception. Thus, the researcher's epistemology has a direct effect upon following actions and decisions. My values and beliefs as researcher will bring an additional dimension to the research study. Each researcher is an individual and will thus have different experiences to bring to the table.

Choice and decision-making cannot be person-free, experience-free and show complete anonymity from the researcher because there will always be a reason why the researcher has taken a chosen route as opposed to the alternative. The chosen route will be determined by the researcher's positionality. Abbott is a strong supporter of positionality inclusion within research. Abbott invites judgments and analysis of research to be made using the researcher's experiential and moral position. According to Abbott (1994:vii) 'reflective activity, which enables the learner to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape the future and formulate new knowledge' is essential.

The view which is produced by the researcher's perception of reality will affect the research paradigm under which research is taken. Therefore, the inclusion of positionality is essential and clearly has a positive contribution to make to any piece of research. The researcher's background and thus stance in relation to a particular topic will affect the research process

and is affected by a researcher's values or beliefs (Sikes, 2004). The researcher's positionality determines the methods and methodologies used as a direct result of the researcher's epistemological assumptions and assumptions concerning human interaction with surrounding environments (Sikes, 2004). At every stage of a research process, a researcher's values or belief system are prevalent and therefore, with the absence of positionality, a reader's perception of a piece of research could be entirely different (May, 2011).

If it is possible to appreciate the magnitude of the researcher's paradigm then it goes without saying that the importance and significance of the part played by positionality within a piece of research is highly recognisable. Positionality, paradigms and methods are all inter-linked. It is evident to me that the inclusion of positionality within a piece of research is of paramount importance not only for the researcher but also for the reader. Without positionality it becomes almost impossible to appreciate a piece of research without the question of bias being introduced. The inclusion of positionality creates transparency which tries to eradicate bias as far as is possible and enables the reader to read the research in a particular context and light thus adding credibility and prestige to the research.

Conversely the inclusion of positionality can be seen as making a negative contribution to educational research. Pillow (2003) suggests 'researcher know thyself', but does the reader need to know the researcher in the same way? A general assumption is that all educational researchers are striving to produce good quality and credible research which can only be achieved through including positionality within the research. 'Making positions transparent does not make them unproblematic' (Spivak, 1988:6). There is an assumption that by getting to know the real researcher the reader is able to credit the research with more value and yet this could produce the opposite effect (Pillow, 2003). There is a possibility that the end product could be that having read the trials and tribulations of the researcher's life the reader may feel that the research is so biased as a result of it that it is completely discredited. Thus, the inclusion of positionality ultimately could possibly have the opposite effect to that originally intended. There is a school of thought that the inclusion of positionality is fashionable and it is included to simply check it off a long list of expected facets of educational research (Winter, 2011). If researchers are only paying lip service to the trends of the present day will their research still have sufficient value in years to come when perhaps the inclusion of positionality is no longer fashionable?

Reading a researcher's positionality produces a pre-conceived idea as to what the researcher's stand in relation to the research topic will be without even having read the research. The inclusion of positionality could determine the way in which the reader will interpret the research. This pre-determination is unintended by the researcher and is in fact the exact opposite to the desired effect that the researcher had wanted to create. By including positionality educational researchers are aiming to produce research which is free from bias. Therefore, it can be understood that the inclusion of positionality is being done with the best of intentions so that researchers are seen as objective. This is an almost impossible situation to create (Pile and Thrift, 1995). However, it almost creates the reverse situation where there is intentional bias created by the researcher so that the reader interprets the research in the correct light.

Opposing arguments to the inclusion of positionality within educational research are generally focused upon the removal of credibility from the research. In addition to the effect on the research, there may be an effect for the researcher. Researchers do not only carry out their own research but also analyse the work of fellow researchers. If this analysis and ultimate criticism of other researchers' work is based upon the positionality of the researcher, then the analysis of the research is no longer a criticism of the research per se but instead becomes a personal attack on the researcher (Winter, 2011). There is not a large number of researchers who wish to put themselves through the ordeal of having reflexivity used as an attack against him or her personally or as a character assassination (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

The idea that it is unnecessary to include positionality within educational research is summed up in the form of questions by Pillow: was the author's life history necessary to analyse the data, did its inclusion limit the analysis of the data, was the research enhanced by the inclusion of positionality? (Pillow, 2003). If the answer to all three of these questions is a negative one then the inclusion of positionality within a piece of research is superfluous. However, a researcher will always carry with him or her positionality which will affect their decision-making during the research process and it is therefore a matter for the researcher to decide whether the revelation of such positionality will add or detract to the research being produced.

The inclusion of positionality is to eliminate bias as no researcher wishes to carry out biased research. Bias in interviewing can occur due to the sampling, phrasing of questions and selective recording of responses (Oppenheim, 1992). A researcher's position is revealed in the light of background, context, history, values and beliefs and all other elements and experiences which have had an impact on a researcher's view of reality. The inclusion of positionality upholds the requirement for transparency within educational research. Without the revelation of the individual, research cannot be positioned in the light of the surrounding context and events and there is the possibility that it could be seen as being biased.

It is necessary to take

Consideration of the perceptual, political and cultural circumstances that form the to – as well as impregnate- the interpretations (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009:9).

Therefore, I find it very difficult to support the idea that any notion or idea can be stated without it having been tainted by my past knowledge and experiences thus affecting the overall outcome of the research.

Any suggestion that the knowledge generated by educational research is based on rational foundations is no longer viable and the belief that it operates on the basis of uncontested and impersonal standards of objectivity and truth no longer makes any sense (Carr, 2010).

It could be argued that objectivity is almost a mythical concept. The absence of objectivity only constitutes a negative aspect of a piece of research if the researcher's positionality is not included. When stance and personal views are not declared then there is the possibility of entering the realms of bias which thus questions the validity. This therefore highlights the importance of the positive contribution made by positionality within a piece of research: 'I regard bias as entry-level theorising' (Wolcott 1995:196). Biased research represents a lack of quality in the research and it therefore almost becomes redundant as there is no enhancement of knowledge as a result of its poor quality. Positionality helps to eliminate the questions behind decisions and helps to produce good quality and respected research.

I am a qualified solicitor and secondary school Modern Languages' teacher. My first qualification was in languages and I then completed a law degree and subsequently qualified as a solicitor. Following the economic crisis I was made redundant as a solicitor. I retrained as a Modern Languages' teacher, and taught in a school where I was Director of Learning for Modern Foreign Languages and English as an Additional Language. I was also a whole school teaching and learning lead. As the economic market improved I relocated and am now practising as a solicitor again. I use analytical skills on a daily basis and am constantly assessing clients' cases and questioning situations to endeavour to find solutions for my clients. My use of presenting cases and analysis of different viewpoints in order to achieve positive outcomes for clients demonstrates my position in terms of approaching research from an interpretative paradigm. Similarly, my skills in language learning and teaching denote my position that there are multiple realities and different versions of the truth.

It is difficult, if not by definition impossible, for the researchers to clarify the taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots in their own culture, research community and language (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009:9).

My social background is that I am white British, Christian and an only child. I have been brought up by my parents who are also both solicitors. I attended a private school from the age of 3 to 18 and have studied at a number of universities to gain my various degrees. I have had a privileged upbringing and am of a Conservative persuasion. During my childhood I had little contact with peers from a different social upbringing and who attended a school within the state system until I went to university. The first time I visited a state school was during my teaching practice for the PGCE qualification. In my experience state schools are very different to private schools and the intake is also different. However, during my career in schools I was able to continually make comparisons between private, state and academy schools in particular in relation to each school's priorities. These various elements of my social and professional background have shaped my position to approach research with an emphasis upon experience to demonstrate how a policy has affected individuals and how individuals of differing experiences have received and engaged with government policy. Arguably, not every person who has had the same lived experiences as myself in terms of education and social upbringing would necessarily have had the same positionality because no two people can have exactly the same experiences. My professional background and current job have had a great influence upon how I perceive the world and individuals and my experience of working with various individuals has affected my positionality. However, someone else with the same job may have different lived experiences which may affect the way in which they approach certain issues and those may colour his or her positionality. Therefore, someone else with similar lived experiences and a different positionality may have approached this research in a different way and with a different emphasis which in turn may have produced different findings.

This is a complex area and not a main focus of the research. However, it is important to acknowledge this because just as my positionality as the researcher affects how the data may be interpreted, the positionality of the individual participants and their social, political, professional and cultural backgrounds may influence their responses and lived experiences. It was not within the constraints of this study to delve into the positionality of every participant except for their professional capacity within the school and experience. An area for further study may be to compare participants' social, cultural and political experiences and how their positionality affects their lived experiences.

### **3.5 Methodology**

Methodology is influenced by a researcher's ontological and epistemological stance and is the logic or philosophical framework to be followed when undertaking research (Brewer, 2000). The procedural aspects of research are referred to as the methods and the methodology is a tool to aid researchers to appreciate the process of the research rather than the methods used (Kaplan, 1973). It is important to show the relationship between the evidence collected and the conclusion made by way of a logic which explains the relationship and supports the validity of the research (Arthur, 2012). Research design must not only be appropriate for the research topic but also to the data which is to be collected. The researcher's paradigm will affect his or her perception of the research topic and how it is to be studied together with the type of data to be collected and the way in which it is to be analysed (Arthur, 2012).

The positivist research paradigm and thus quantitative research methodologies focus upon the usage of statistical data and hypothesis testing (Newman and Benz, 1998). This methodology is used to prove or disprove a theory using experimental research, surveys or questionnaires for example. Alternatively, the interpretative research paradigm and thus qualitative research methodologies focus upon interpretation and claims which are evidence based and allow the researcher to understand society and culture (Arthur, 2012). Qualitative

research aims to answer why something is as it is or how something has occurred (Mills and Birks, 2014). This methodology focuses for example upon feelings, interpretation and experience, the existence of common themes, by way of case study, ethnography and action research.

My focus for this project was the experiences of stakeholders regarding the Academies Act 2010. Therefore, I was discovering the feelings, emotions and interpretation of the stakeholders. The logic behind the research was that of a qualitative nature as opposed to quantitative in so far as I was not trying to prove a hypothesis but instead discover how the policy on academies had been received and the impact it had had on stakeholders.

### **3.6 Methods**

Research methods are the procedures used to collect data which determine the reliability of the research (Brewer, 2000). The key difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods is their flexibility, qualitative being the more flexible (Cohen et al., 2011). Quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires are often based upon closed questions which allow the researcher to make meaningful comparisons between participants as the same questions are often asked in the same order. Alternatively, qualitative methods such as interviews allow the participants to extend their responses and provide more in-depth responses through the use of open-ended questions and the opportunity for the researcher to ask follow-up questions.

I could have used focus groups. However, the research focus was politically sensitive in so far as I wanted to establish the different lived experiences of the stakeholders at different levels of seniority within the academies. Therefore, if I had used focus groups there may have been participants who may not have wanted to be fully open about the experience with fear of repercussions in their job following the research (Gill et al., 2008). Therefore, I did consider this method but decided it was inappropriate.

The use of surveys was an option open to me and this would have allowed a greater number of academies to have been involved in the research. However, this would have also meant using a more quantitative approach. Thus, the personalised inclusion would have been lost as to how a national policy had been implemented and thus had affected individuals at a local level. I could have used questionnaires to collect survey data which traditionally would have produced data which could have been numerically analysed (Wilson and McLean, 1994). However, the disadvantage of using such a method is the time factor needed to develop questionnaires and the lack of flexibility in the possible answers. Questionnaires lend themselves to producing answers which can be numerically analysed and thus are more appropriate for research undertaken under a positivist paradigm.

Depending upon the paradigm postulated by the researcher, he or she will use various methodologies and methods appropriate to his or her paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Researchers of the interpretative paradigm will use methods which allow them to find knowledge through experiences and reasons for human behaviour in such a context. Conversely raw data and information gathering from person-less individuals will be done through methods suited to the positivist paradigm. Where the scientific method is used as a basis then the positivist paradigm, whether this be a myth or not, is encompassed in this theory. Therefore, experiments and controlled tests are likely to be used. Case studies and interviews are more likely to be used within the interpretative paradigm as these enable the researcher to extract reasons and causes for events and perceptions about the research topic. Personalisation is the key to the division between the use of different methods.

It was important to understand the policy which drove the impact upon stakeholders and I therefore undertook policy analysis to appreciate how the national policy was implemented at a local level and how it may have varied between academies. Policy analysis creates the

setting for a better understanding of, and an improvement in practice. The reason for policy analysis depends greatly upon the researcher and whether or not he or she is approaching the analysis from a traditional or critical paradigm (Warren, 2011). Under the traditional paradigm, policy analysis is carried out to identify the most efficient course of action to adopt or implement a decision.

In an effort to ensure credibility of the research, I undertook methods of triangulation by carrying out an analysis of policy documents which were made available on the academies' websites. The data taken from the documents on school websites used throughout the study was cross-matched with responses from stakeholders during the interviews and public domain documents such as Ofsted documentation. Documentary analysis alone does not allow a researcher to question the rationale behind the document. I examined the points outlined in the policies and analysed the implementation of the policy in relation to the data collected through the interviews about the implementation of the national policy. I also examined the link between the policy documents presented to the public on the academies' websites and the perceptions of the participants. There was very little made available to me in terms of documents from the participating schools but I used the available documents and referred to them as much as possible.

According to Bailey, documents are most often available at the convenience of the researcher and they are factual. However, they are only factual in the context of what the writer wishes the reader to know (Bailey, 1996). Documentary analysis can assist when the researcher is undertaking a longitudinal study aiming to show the evolution of events or wishing to appreciate the events or feelings at any one particular time provided the document is contemporaneous to the event. In particular, it can allow for a large number of participants to be studied, in particular, when analysing registers. Alternatively, documents can be subjective having been written for a purpose with perhaps an agenda and can be biased and possibly lacking validity. The document should be analysed within the context and time within which it was written. The difficulty is that there is no opportunity to question the rationale behind the document unless other methods are employed; hence the importance of triangulation.

I undertook a limited amount of content analysis to analyse documents, in so far as using the academies' websites and documents available on them, to determine whether there was any information or use of language and terms which either supported the findings from the interviews or contradicted them (Lumby and Muijs, 2014). Additionally, I considered reports from the Ofsted website; data to establish each school's position in terms of Ofsted's perception of the schools and GCSE results data and performance.

I decided to use interviews as the method of data collection as the aim of the research was to obtain the feelings, perceptions and lived experiences of the participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The use of interviews allows participants to freely express their perception of the research topic (Cohen et al., 2011). However, it is necessary to be very clear when using interviews as to the purpose of those interviews. Semi-structured interviews create sufficient purpose so as to focus the participant and ensure that all areas are covered but at the same time allow more information or clarification to be sought should it be necessary.

Structured interviews, whilst ensuring all participants are asked the same questions, prevent the use of follow-up questions which could add essential value to the research (Bailey, 1996). Unstructured interviews allow for more interaction between the researcher and the participant; however they do not ensure that all participants are asked the same questions and the manageability in terms of timings is also an issue (Klenke, 2008). Semi-structured interviews ensure the researcher has a detailed idea of the interview content but it does allow the researcher to develop any particular areas of the topic which are mentioned by the participant thus gaining a better understanding of beliefs underpinning the answers which are provided (Mitchell and Jolley, 2012).



I, therefore, used semi-structured interviews to interview the participants who had developed and implemented policy, and those who had received it, together with consideration of the policy documents and how they coincided with the national policy to establish how the national policy had been implemented (Appendix 2). This sample triangulation created an overall picture from different perspectives.

It is accepted that this was a small-scale research project due to limitations such as work commitments, access to the academy schools and the limited time to conduct the research. Therefore, the interviews were one-off events and it would have been incredibly difficult and impractical to repeat them.

I undertook intensive interviews and elite interviews. The teachers who were interviewed were not chosen because of their role within the school but simply because they had volunteered to take part in the research. Conversely, the elite interviews were conducted with those individuals who were approached due to their specific role within the education sector (Hochschild, 2009).

### **3.7 Sample**

The sample is very important in ensuring that obtaining different viewpoints on the same subject matter is done in such a way as to create valid and credible research. 'An appropriate sample size is one that adequately answers the research questions' (Marshall, 1996:523). This study sought to explore the views of teachers, Head Teachers or Principals, a Consultant Principal and an Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families as policy makers in the education sector and in terms of how the Academies Act has been implemented and its impact upon their work or work setting as individuals. It was important to interview a variety of stakeholders holding different positions within the education sector to establish whether the impact and the transposition of the Academies Act differed, depending upon the position held by the stakeholder. Stakeholders who have not had exposure to certain elements of school life such as managing funding may not necessarily have an appreciation of the nuances within that area of a school structure. Therefore, there are certain areas of the Academies Act which may not be seen by an individual classroom teacher and may only be appropriate for decision makers within a school such as management. However, that is not to say that the classroom teacher would not see the effects and have lived experiences of such provisions even though they do not necessarily play a role within those aspects of decision making. I chose a small sample and gathered and analysed the data in depth as opposed to taking a broad brush approach. It was important to appreciate that the experiences of a person in management in a school were not the same as a classroom teacher. Likewise, a person in management may not offer the same lived experiences as the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families because of their individual roles and the constraints placed upon them together with the impact that the Academies Act could have upon such roles.

According to Gorard, sampling is done as a shortcut due to everyday life constraints such as time, money, effort and access (Gorard, 2003). I decided that it was better to reveal an issue or pattern in a small-scale in-depth study as opposed to a large-scale study (Basit, 2010). If the situation had been such that there had been a list of all academies available and all of the academies had agreed to participate, then I would have used one of the probability sampling methods such as simple random, stratified random or cluster random. However, as this was not the case, and it was incredibly difficult to persuade academies to take part, the more preferred sampling method was that of non-probability. This is an obstacle with which a lot of researchers are met (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). Due to the lack of willingness on the part of the academies to participate, I chose the convenience and purposive method of sampling where I was restricted by time and location.

I approached a mixture of primary and secondary schools; over 12 were approached, where the Head Teacher and three other teachers were interviewed each of whom had at least 15

years' teaching experience. However, the majority of schools approached were unwilling to participate and indeed only one Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families was prepared to be interviewed. This was perhaps because the Head Teachers and or governors were apprehensive as to what revelations members of staff may make as part of the interviews. There were no primary school academies which were prepared to participate in the research. Therefore, I was able to interview staff in a total of four schools; three of which were converter academies: academies which had chosen to become an academy, and one of which was a sponsored academy (an academy which was forced into becoming an academy due to its poor results and Ofsted grading), an Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families and a Consultant Principal. I approached both sponsored and converter academies. I did not make a conscious decision to interview converter or sponsored academies. The final sample of schools was determined by the schools which responded positively and allowed me access to the school. Academies are an experimental policy and are institutions which remain averse to external research and the sharing of information with the outside world. This, therefore, makes research incredibly difficult in this field (Gleeson, 2011). I used sample triangulation by interviewing participants of differing levels of seniority and knowledge of academisation together with methodological triangulation by conducting interviews and policy analysis.

The interviews took place at the stakeholders' workplace. In an ideal world, I would have wished to also interview teachers of differing seniority in school but time and geographic constraints meant that it was not possible to include more participants.

Due to my positionality I would have expected those in a position of power such as the Principal or Head Teacher to have had a different perspective and lived experience to those of a classroom teacher. During my career within schools, I experienced a clear divide between management and staff within the school. When I became part of management it was easier for me to appreciate the impact of actions not only upon the individual staff but also across the school and borough. Therefore, I had this in mind when interviewing the various stakeholders that their individual experience of their role within school may limit their knowledge and lived experiences. I was able to empathise with both classroom teachers and those in more senior roles when interviewing them because I had an appreciation and understanding of their individual position.

**Table of Participants**

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Year the school academised	2011	2013	2006	2010
No. of pupils at first Ofsted inspection following academisation	1827	765	1003	1276
A*-C at GCSE pre-academisation	78%	44%	43%	81%
Ofsted grading at the time of research	2	3	3	1

<b>Participant Location</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Role of participants</b>
School-1		Converter	Principal
			Vice Principal
			Assistant Principal
			Associate Assistant Principal
School-2		Converter	Executive Head Teacher
			Assistant Head Teacher
			Teacher in Charge of Behaviour
			Lead Practitioner
School-3		Sponsored	Vice Principal
			Senior Leader
			Head of Year 7
			Alternative Curriculum Teacher
School-4		Converter	Head Teacher
			Deputy Head Teacher 1
			Deputy Head Teacher 2
			Assistant Head Teacher
Local Authority		N/A	Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families
Private Consultancy and Local Authority		Converter Sponsored and	Consultant Principal

### 3.8 Ethics

Ethics arise from the creation of codes of practice and principles of morality which originate therein (May, 2011). Choices must be made as a result of ethical and moral reasoning where there is no danger to participants whilst still producing rigour in the research process. There must be no falsifying in order to placate a particular audience and at all times there must be full respect for all those involved. This type of research touched various issues raised within the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011).

I have adhered to these guidelines throughout the research process. This is an interpretative piece of research and therefore could pose a number of ethical problems; including the impact which the research could have upon the participants, given that they may never have considered some of the issues arising from the questions being asked. According to Ramos (1989), the typical problems which could arise are the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, the researcher's positionality and the design of the research itself in relation to how it is conducted given the nature of the research and its participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all participants (Basit, 2010). In addition, the participants were approached in an ethical manner and no coercion took place.

As far as this research is concerned, I was very aware that interviewing staff at schools where academisation had taken place, and where jobs were not stable, could be points to consider and I ought to be sensitive in this regard. Participants may not have felt free to express their views with fear of pressure from other staff or the academy itself. In addition, interviewing an Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families and a Consultant Principal who also works for the DFE could have touched on highly sensitive political issues given that both of these roles are clearly politically driven. Consequently, the responses given by these two participants may have been influenced by governmental agendas.

I submitted the research project to the Faculty's Ethics Committee using the ethics form (Appendix 1). I was given approval to undertake the research. Following this and prior to undertaking any research I obtained informed consent from all participants and necessary institutions. Data has been stored in a password-protected location in accordance with ethics guidance (Ethics Guidebook, 2015).

I avoided the use of leading questions to formulate clear and unambiguous questions to eliminate the possibility of any of the participants misunderstanding the questions. The guidance of Kvale was followed as to how an interviewer should conduct him or herself in terms of being informed about the participants' background and their role within the establishment, being sensitive and empathic towards participants and allowing them time to consider the question and formulate an answer and reacting to the participants' answers and then steering the interview to maximise the findings (Kvale, 1996). I did not selectively record the responses of the participants and all interviews were transcribed and analysed to eliminate any bias (Lee, 1993). I found it more suitable to use my own method of coding and categorisation using highlighters and handwritten notes, as opposed to using an automated method, as this suited my learning style.

### **3.9 Validity and Reliability**

Reliability relies upon results from investigations being consistent over a period of time and the ability for the investigations to be replicated in a similar manner; if this is possible then the research method is deemed to be reliable (Merriam, 1995). A threat to reliability is the replication of investigations by different researchers and whether these investigations are subjective. Validity is categorised by different researchers such as content validity, jury validity and cultural validity (Cohen et al., 2011). However, the topic of validity is not the focus of this research project. Research is valid when a research instrument measures the focus topic designed by the researcher and it is done so in an appropriate manner and is of use (Merriam, 1995). Internal validity is where the research is affected by issues within the study itself for example the data collection or the control of variables whereas external validity relates to how the findings of the research may be applied to other settings (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993).

The inclusion of positionality and the thought that it constitutes a positive contribution to education research is centred upon positionality affecting paradigm and therefore affecting methodology and methods used in research. In order for this to be the case there has to be a link made between positionality and paradigm and then paradigm and methodology and methods which link to the validity of research undertaken.

Positionality assists with the validity and credibility of the research but to develop this further other steps were undertaken to ensure as much as possible that the research was valid and credible. Sample triangulation was used to ensure rigour in the process. If a researcher relies on one type of participants and method, and this is then seen to be weak, there is then no support from other elements of the process to support or refute the findings (Lin, 1976).

The use of the word reliability in relation to qualitative research is frequently interchanged with credibility, confirmability, dependability and consistency (Cohen et al., 2011). According to LeCompte and Preissle, reliability and qualitative research do not generally coincide (LeCompte and Preissle 1993). Alternatively, reliability is better associated with quantitative research in which there is less possibility of variation due to the controllability of variables. However, qualitative research can endeavour to replicate certain elements which consequently may be perceived as being more reliable to those who find replication to be the key element of reliability. The issue of replication can be dealt with through stability of observations (the question of whether these observations would have been the same had they have taken place at a different time and location), parallel forms (the option for the researcher to focus upon other elements of the observation) and inter-rater reliability (the possibility of another researcher interpreting the study in the same way) (Denzin, 1994). According to Kvale, interpretations may vary depending upon the researcher but that does not detract from the existence of a reality during any one particular interview, document analysis or observation (Kvale 1996).

I undertook a pilot study to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. This was also done to ensure clarity of questions and to establish how long the interviews would take and how long it would take to analyse the data. The pilot study was carried out with participants not at the schools where the interviews took place. I used the interview questions which were used in the final interviews for teachers (Appendix 2). The pilot was very helpful and it informed me that the questions were appropriately worded and were comprehensible to a participant. I learnt that my estimated time for the questions was realistic. However, I appreciated that it would always be necessary to allow for flexibility of the timings as it would depend upon how much the participant wished to elaborate upon points which in turn would provide rich data based on his or her experiences. Following the pilot study, it was not necessary to make any changes to the interview schedule.

### **3.10 Procedure**

I was a member of various organisations which serve schools across the area and, together with this, I had completed the National College's National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership. I had a wide range of contacts which allowed me to discuss the possibilities of undertaking research within these schools.

A number of academies in the West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire areas were approached both in the primary and secondary sector. The majority of academies either did not respond or were unwilling to participate in the research. The academies which were willing to take part were located in both areas though none were in the primary sector. There were insufficient responses in the West and South Yorkshire areas. Therefore, I widened the area and approached academies in Cheshire.

The Head Teachers or Principals of the academies were contacted directly by letter, outlining the details of the research, and ensuring all ethical points were addressed (Appendix 3). Consent forms and participant information sheets were included in order for these to be passed to those who wished to participate (Appendix 4 and 5). Academies which were willing to take part in the research either contacted me by telephone or email to arrange appointments. Interviews took place at the academy schools so as to ensure that the participants were in their natural environment and as little disruption as possible to the researched location took place ensuring that interviews were completed in the time available

to participants. I had to visit academies after my working hours which made it logistically incredibly difficult to organise as some potential participants would only take part if the interviews were conducted during their working hours. Very few participants were willing to give their time out of hours. I interviewed those who had volunteered following an announcement from Head Teachers or Principals outlining the research and asking for participation. I was in full-time employment and was therefore restricted as to the times when I was available to undertake the interviews.

Each interview was approximately 30 minutes in duration and explored the perceptions of the stakeholders in response to a number of prepared questions and follow-up questions. The selection of participants depended very much upon the willingness, time and availability of staff. Participants were of differing levels of seniority but as I made it a pre-requisite that participants should have at least 15 years' teaching experience, the process was self-selective in that all of the participants were in positions of seniority, (albeit of varying degrees) and they were working in an academy.

I contacted several Executive Directors for Children, Young People and Families and only one responded and was willing to participate. This interview was in depth and lasted longer than the anticipated 30 minutes. The Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families assisted me in contacting a Consultant Principal who worked across four academy schools and as a consultant in various education roles. The questions for the semi-structured interviews for these two participants were adapted accordingly to allow for the appropriate level of discussion on policy making. The interviews took place over a seven-month period due to the limited availability and location of the participants together with the difficulty in finding academies which were willing to participate.

All participants had consented to the interviews and completed the consent forms showing that they had an understanding of the procedure. Most of the interviews were carried out in the agreed time of thirty minutes except for some where more follow-up questions were needed to clarify or request an expansion of the response provided.

Participants involved were interviewed in an office in which there was only the participant and myself present. The schools were aware of my attendance and therefore participants were available for interview upon my arrival at the schools. The schools were very accommodating during the interviews. I reassured the participants prior to the interviews regarding anonymity and ethical procedures. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and I took contemporaneous notes which allowed follow-up questions as the interviews unfolded.

### **3.11 Data Analysis**

I used a qualitative methodology stemming from an interpretative paradigm. Therefore, the analysis involved in data thus collected would be one of establishing patterns and theories, categorising findings and regularities. In this project, a case study was undertaken and therefore a narrative description was appropriate raising the issues within each chosen theme throughout. In narrative research, there is the interpretation of meanings by way of themes and references to social and structural elements which reveals 'powerful discourses, hierarchies, presuppositions, deliberate omissions and polar opposites' (Grbich 1999: 52). A case study allows the portrayal of findings followed by an interpretation of participants' situations and accounts of the research topic. Additionally, this type of research style allows the researcher to discover the behaviours of participants and the detail and meaning behind the data in order to contribute to and develop the research topic (Cohen et al., 2011). This research was performed through a small sample and therefore the most practical and effective way of analysing the data was to consider each theme in each school and then to amalgamate the findings across all of the participants. The presentation of the findings relates to how many participants included a particular theme or response.

I undertook qualitative research which lends itself to large amounts of data during the data collection process (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, it is imperative for a researcher to understand how the data will be analysed to ensure the data collection is specific to the research focus (Miles and Huberman (1984). According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), data analysis should be considered at the start of the research because the researcher needs to appreciate, prior to setting up the study, what he or she wants to do with the data and how it is to be analysed and presented ultimately. Following the data collection, the data must be categorised, sorted and put into themes in order that the raw data is able to be converted from a mere description of events to being explained by the researcher who concludes with the generation of a generalisation (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). Therefore, I took this into consideration when undertaking this research. If I had not considered the way the data was to be analysed prior to starting the data collection, then I would not necessarily have collected the appropriate data or used the best research instrument in order to present the findings. When using qualitative data analysis, there are a variety of ways to analyse data; for example coding and content analysis, discourse analysis and pattern responses. This list is not exhaustive. However, I carried out a typological analysis of the data where the data was classified into themes (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). My job as a solicitor lends itself to analysing cases and witness statements for example to establish whether there is a common theme to substantiate a particular argument. This skill was invaluable when considering the data for this research. I separated the themes such as freedom and finances for example and the varying perceptions postulated by the participants and organised the data by participants and reactions to the identified themes. These themes were then presented in relation to the participants and categories of participants across and within the participant schools. This was then presented in an orderly manner followed by my interpretation (Lofland, 1970). It was important for me to ensure that the data was collated in an organised, systematic format comparing groups from different academies to ensure the findings of the research were comprehensible and accessible to the reader (Becker and Geer, 1960).

I used a similar way of coding and typological analysis as to that used when analysing the interview transcripts. I used a thematic approach to establish any common themes running through the documents available which would either support the perceptions of the participants or show a differing position. As noted earlier, there was a very limited number of documents available from the individual schools and the documents which were available were mainly those which were on the individual websites of each school. Therefore, it would be difficult to establish whether participants, in some cases, may demonstrate the position as per the information to the world at large and if so, this may reflect an individual's positionality as to whether they are swayed by such information as to feel the need to speak in accordance with the official available information or as to whether they are prepared to offer their own perspective. However, there were too few documents available and thus too little documentary analysis to make such a claim. This is perhaps an area for further to study to establish whether stakeholders' perceptions reflect the position presented to the world at large regarding an organisation or whether the information available to the public is how the establishments want the world to view it.

I used the 2010 White Paper as a starting point for my research. This involved a typological analysis of the Paper in order to assist in finding themes which may be appropriate to use as topics within the research questions. A documentary analysis of the White Paper could be a thesis in its own right. Indeed, Lumby and Muijs (2014) have considered the language used in this Paper in detail including the meaning behind its usage and the effect it creates. This level of exploration was not appropriate for this research and for that reason I have not delved into this in great depth but used it for triangulation in my research.

### **3.12 Summary**

Overall, I have considered the depth and scope of the research project together with epistemological and ontological stances. The decision to use interviews alongside some documentary analysis as opposed to other research methods has been justified given the nature of the interpretative type of research and its questions. I have discussed the coding and interpretation of data together with the importance and assurance to anonymise the participants. I have also emphasised the problems of carrying out qualitative research and the impact and difficulties presented by the researcher's positionality. However, I have tried to be as transparent as possible to allow the full credibility of the research to prevail.



## Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from 15 teachers with various roles within academy schools, and two professionals holding different roles within the education sector. Academy schools are referred to as per the table below to maintain the anonymity of participants. The data is analysed and discussed under the themes of the two key research questions and the secondary research questions.

#### Academy response descriptors

18 interviews in total were undertaken.

Descriptor	Number responding
Very few	1-3
Few	4-6
Some	7-9
Many	10-12
Most	13-15
Majority	16-18

Participants are referred to as in the table below:

Descriptor	Type of School	Participant
School-1	Converter academy	Principal, Vice Principal, Assistant Principal, Associate Assistant Principal
School-2	Converter academy	Executive Head Teacher, Assistant Head Teacher, Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, Lead Practitioner
School-3	Sponsored academy	Vice Principal, Senior Leader, Head of Year 7, Alternative Curriculum Teacher
School-4	Converter academy	Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher 1, Deputy Head Teacher 2, Assistant Head Teacher
Executive Director	Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families	Executive Director

Consultant Principal	Consultant Principal in converter and sponsored academies across the UK	Consultant Principal
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#### **4.1 Education stakeholders' perceptions regarding the aims of the Academies Act 2010**

The perceptions of stakeholders regarding the aim of the Academies Act illustrate that the most popular perception was autonomy which accords with Coldron et al's. (2014) research. Finance which accords with Ozga's (2000) notion of economic agenda for policy making and improved attainment were also referred to. Participants' knowledge of the Academies Act as the policy for academisation was poor and in most cases non-existent. An analysis of the data demonstrates that there was only one participant who was from School-2 who was aware of the Academies Act 2010 being the policy which governs academy schools. Many participants did not know which policy governed academies and for the most part simply responded with the word 'no'. Many participants hesitated when responding and showed little effort to try to remember the name of the policy.

Some of the participants expressed embarrassment as they felt that they should know the name of the policy which governs academies. In particular, some of those who did not know were participants who held high-ranking roles within schools where the impact of the Academies Act would be most prevalent during decision-making. The negative answer was not confined to any particular level of the role of the participants within school. However, this was a worrying finding considering the majority of participants had roles where they made decisions governed by this policy and yet they were unaware of its existence and in most cases of its general or specific content. One participant when asked if he knew which national policy governs academies replied, 'oh gosh, I should do, but no probably not, no' (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1). This was not an uncommon response.

There was a mixed response as to whether participants were aware of the Academies Act as being the policy which governs their place of work. This mixed response was also mixed within each school. A few of the participants realised that there was a policy and acknowledged this fact yet were unable to name it: 'Yes, but I don't know the name of it' (Head of Year 7, School-3); 'Yes I do, but I couldn't tell you the name of it' (Lead Practitioner, School-2). Very few were able to say that they knew where to find it even though they did not know the name; 'I can't quote it to you but I could lay my hands on it' (Executive Director). Very few thought that they knew which policy governs academies yet went on to wrongly name the policy; 'Yes. DFE' (Assistant Head Teacher, School-2). Thus, the responses were only all negative in one school and the others were a mixture of not knowing about the policy, or knowing that something exists but they were not really aware of what it was and thinking that something exists yet naming it incorrectly.

Considering the responses school by school, none of the participants from School-1 were able to identify the name of the policy governing academies. This is interesting because School-1 was a very successful school and perhaps this questions whether a school needs to know about the Academies Act or indeed of its existence to have high standards. School-2 had the Head Teacher who was the only participant out of all interviewees to know about the policy and yet his staff either did not know, or thought they knew, but in fact did not. This school, according to Ofsted data, was the second most underperforming out of those interviewed yet the leader was well informed about the policy (Ofsted, 2015a). The school had been underperforming prior to this Head Teacher's appointment and continued to underperform. Therefore, perhaps it does not follow that being aware of the existence of a policy, and having

detailed knowledge of it, leads to creating and leading a successful school. In School-4 the Head Teacher and nearly all the participants from this school either did not know or thought they knew but did not know anything about the existence of the Academies Act. School-4 was the most successful school out of the four schools in which I undertook interviews. This seems to reiterate the point that knowing about the policy and being a successful school does not necessarily go hand in hand. School-3 had the same Executive Head Teacher as School-2 and had been an academy for the longest period out of all schools interviewed. The participants of School-3 again either did not know about the policy or thought they knew but were unable to name the policy. School-3 was the most under-performing school out of the four participating schools and yet had been an academy for the longest period. In School-3 there was only one participant who thought they knew about the existence of the policy, but in reality it was clear that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding. All of the other participants responded negatively. Therefore, it seems that there is no connection between either the length of time which a school has been an academy or indeed the level of success of the academy as to whether or not those who work there have any knowledge of the existence of the Academies Act being the policy for academies. The notion of becoming an academy and the reason for it, if the school was not failing, was summed up by the Consultant Principal as; 'if you're outstanding and want some money and freedom' then the academy route is the one to take (Consultant Principal). This accords with research conducted by West (2015) and the availability of freedom to operate alone.

#### **4.1.1 Attainment**

There was almost an element of fear that pupils in Britain will be left behind on an international level if the academies were not introduced (Gove, 2010). The media has fuelled this notion and it would appear to have increased pressure upon the government to act (Shepherd, 2010). The social standing of a school due to its location may prejudice the attainment data and thus attainment may always be an issue with the notion of social segregation jeopardising the improvement of pupil outcomes (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). However, it remains to be seen as to whether being an academy affects the level of attainment in such a way that it is irrefutable evidence of being the catalyst to the improvement of pupil attainment. Disadvantaged schools were a focus where it was felt that the pupils needed improvements (Gorard, 2009). Areas in the country which showed historically to be underperforming meant that they were in greater need of support and radical action to improve standards (DfEE, 2001). Therefore, those schools containing less pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) boast of more improved attainment (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). It is not surprising that the initial academies had a higher intake of FSM pupils given that they were in some of the most deprived areas. This perhaps justifies the poor level of results in these academies. Therefore, it becomes unrealistic and unjust to compare academies in areas such as those and academies in other areas which are more affluent and indeed also those which are converter academies (Gorard, 2011). The quality of the pupils in an intake is reflected in the attainment outcomes which correspond with the findings in US Schools (Eyles et al., 2015).

The already existing gulf between schools has been widened when the option to convert to an academy was extended to all schools by the coalition government (Machin and Veroit, 2010). Alternatively, according to Riddell (2016a), the concept of academisation across all schools can be seen as a way to address the inequalities in attainment. However, if all academies, whether converter or forced, are receiving the same input in order to raise standards, then surely if the standards increase at the same rate then the gap will always exist. This defeats the object of the policy which initially was to raise standards in underperforming schools. Underperforming schools are only classed as such because they are measured against better performing schools. A school's viability is measured by its attainment (West, 2015). Therefore, if successful schools are allowed to become academies, then the underperforming schools will always be underperforming as they will always be compared to better performing schools which have received the same support and so have improved further.

Some participants believed that the introduction of academies was for the improvement of schools which were failing and were classed as failing in accordance with Ofsted and the inspection regime. The reduction of Local Authority control means that Ofsted has a larger role to play in terms of reporting to the government as there is no impartial government tier control between the school itself and the government (Curtis et al., 2008, Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). Improvements in performance in underperforming schools were the initial force behind the policy achieved through new and innovative methods (Curtis et al., 2008). The participants with this belief were spread across all schools. However, there were some more obvious patterns. Very few participants in each school believed attainment to be the aim for academies and, instead, believed financial advantage and greater autonomy were aims. At least one participant in each school was of the belief that the reason to become an academy was to improve pupil attainment. There was a clear division between the responses from sponsored and converter academies. This is perhaps understandable given that the performance of a school is measured by its results and if results are at a lower level in one school then participants are more likely to believe that the reason for change is to improve those results.

There did not appear to be any link between the rank of the participants and their perceptions in respect of raising attainment being the aim for academies. It is a possibility that all participants were aware of the need to continually improve attainment and the pressure and message to do so was continuous regardless of the levels of seniority. Alternatively, raising attainment was present as an aim within each school possibly because those individual participants had more emphasis upon that area of school improvement. Their individual roles within school influenced their perception producing a focus upon attainment as opposed to other areas such as safeguarding and attendance.

Half of the Head Teachers or Principals stated attainment as the aim for academisation. This could be seen to be alarming given that most parents would want attainment to be a priority for any actions taken by a school. Nevertheless, Head Teachers have a role which is so varied and they have to balance all aspects of school life. Therefore, it is possible that, at the time of being interviewed, these participants had other areas upon which they were focusing in their day to day running of the school thus overtaking the core aim of a school being that of attainment. While attainment was not necessarily seen as an aim, the other aims referred to by participants, such as financial gain and greater autonomy, could result in an improvement in attainment. Therefore, the aim may be seen as one aspect, yet improved attainment may be the product of other aims. This will be discussed further in the perceptions' section.

The majority of participants from School-3 believed that the aim for academies was to raise attainment. School-3 was a school which had been in special measures for a number of years and had undergone numerous Ofsted inspections together with constant changes in the leadership team. Therefore, these participants had been part of an academy which was sponsored and became an academy due to its continuous poor pupil attainment. 'Certainly, from our point of view, it's a failing school, continually failing under Ofsted, looking for a new start and need to strive for improvements' (Senior Leader, School-3). Not every school or participant saw the introduction of academies in the same way (Bell and Stevenson, 2006).

Half of the participants in School-2 believed that academies 'were introduced to raise standards' (Lead Practitioner, School-2). As both Schools 2 and 3 had the same Executive Head Teacher, it could be suggested that he was instilling a consistent message and drive to improve standards across both schools. Consequently, it would be understandable that participants would believe the need to academise was in an effort to improve pupil attainment. School-2 was a converter academy even though its results in terms of the percentage of pupils in 2014 gaining A\*-C in GCSEs including English and Maths were less than half that of Schools 1 and 4 which were also converter academies. The Head Teacher of School-2 was the only participant who was able to name the Academies Act 2010 as being the policy governing academies. He was also the only participant who listed all three areas of attainment, finances

and autonomy as being the aims of academies, which also appear as themes throughout the 2010 White Paper (DFE, 2010). Therefore, it could be suggested that he may have had a better understanding of the aims as he was more familiar with the policy. He believed that the notion behind the introduction of academies was 'to have failing schools sponsored by predominantly large organisations' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). Here he introduced the idea of control as well as to raise attainment in underperforming schools. This accords with Ball's (2012) notion of neoliberalism within public sector education.

It appears that the lower attaining and less successful schools had more participants who believed that the aim of the Academies Act 2010 was to assist schools in their quest to improve attainment and raise standards. If a school was already successful it would seem obvious that the conversion to an academy would not necessarily assist in their drive to maintain standards as they had improved standards and had maintained high standards, over many years, without the assistance of being an academy.

Very few participants from School-4, a converter academy, referred to pupil progress as the aim behind the Academies Act 2010. However, pupil progress did not appear to be the highest priority in participants' level of understanding as to what they believed the policy aims to be. One participant had taught at the same school for 34 years and was a Deputy Head Teacher. Therefore, it may be surprising that her focus was not upon attainment, but rather more emphasis was upon control. However, if the school was already successful there may be other areas of school management where she would see more of an influence and purpose in the academisation process. Conversely the Head Teacher of School-4 believed the aim of academisation was 'to raise standards of low achieving schools and under-performing schools' (Head Teacher, School-4).

Very few participants from School-1, a converter academy, believed that academies were created:

to help them [schools] improve and help them with support from other schools; to share expertise from a better or outstanding school to help them raise standards (Vice Principal, School-1).

School-1 was part of a 'teaching school' which means that it is a successful school which helps underperforming schools to develop and improve, and some of its staff worked as Specialist Leaders of Education and spent time supporting less successful and underperforming schools. Therefore, it was evident that very few participants would see the aim of an academy as raising attainment as this is the impact that they see and expect on a daily basis, and as a successful school, it was not necessarily the reason for its conversion. The participants may have simply been reporting on what they thought the principal aim should be taking into consideration all academies and not necessarily on what they thought the aim was based upon their experience of the academy in which they worked.

It was surprising that the Consultant Principal did not state that attainment was an aim of the Academies Act. He spent most of his working time assisting underperforming schools, guiding schools through the academisation process, partnering successful schools with underperforming schools in an effort to support and improve them and yet attainment was, for him, not the aim of academisation but instead greater autonomy for schools. Conversely, the Executive Director who was a Local Authority employee believed that raising attainment was an aim, but doubted whether it could and would be achieved through academisation.

Schools are measured on their performance which relates to pupil attainment. Teachers are measured, and their pay monitored, in accordance with the attainment of the pupils whom they have taught. Pupil attainment allows pupils to be able to compete against other pupils both nationally and internationally. The academies' programme allows pupils in UK schools to be able to be in a position to compete against pupils in an international field and offer the skills

which employers feel pupils need (BBC News, 2010a, Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). This addresses employers' requirements and supports them in their quest to find pupils with these skills via the academies' programme (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2008). It was therefore surprising that there were not more participants who listed attainment as the aim for academisation. Perhaps participants were considering the effects of the Academies Act as opposed to thinking about what they believed the original aim to be. In addition, the research showed that the majority of participants knew very little about the policy and therefore their responses emanated from personal experience as opposed to knowledge about the policy.

#### **4.1.2 Financial Opportunities**

The financial aspect of academies is dealt with in Section 1 of the Academies Act 2010. This focuses on the Funding Agreement and the financial provisions which must be in place when a school becomes an academy. This is a provision in the Act and therefore it would be expected that all academies would have the same agreement and thus be affected in the same way financially. However, the flexibility in the Act is such that there is no one common Funding Agreement and therefore each academy can have a different financial experience. There is a lack of consistency across academies which ultimately impacts upon resources and learning experiences. This questions the equality of academies and whether all pupils are being exposed to the same conditions and have access to the same resources whichever academy they attend. When academies do not all adopt the Model Funding Agreement, it fuels unfairness amongst schools and disadvantages some pupils thus in complete conflict with the Labour government's aim which was to help those who were disadvantaged. The Funding Agreement negotiated by each academy dictates the school's proximity to being governed in the same way as a maintained school (Gleeson, 2011).

Few participants felt that financial gain and opportunity was an aim of academisation. However, all participants held roles within the academy schools which entailed the management of money and an understanding of how finances can impact upon the daily running of the schools both at a classroom level and at a managerial level. The introduction of funds and resources allowed academies to exploit and explore every avenue and opportunity available to them in order to make the academies a success and to do it in any way they saw most fitting for their pupils and the academy's setting (Freedman, 2010).

The viewpoints in respect of financial gain being an aim were in some ways very clear. The most successful school, School-4, had no participants who believed that the aim of academisation was for financial purposes. This could be because they were in a good financial position prior to academisation, being well managed, and thus the financial impact of academisation had not affected them. The participants from School-4 seemed to focus their aim of the Academies Act 2010 to have been improved pupil attainment as opposed to financial gain even though this may have happened as a by-product of academisation.

At the other end of the spectrum, the sponsored academy, School-3, had nearly all participants believing that the aim of academisation was to gain financially with 'an injection of new money and staff' (Senior Leader, School-3). This school had undergone a number of changes over the years with various changes in leadership. This suggests that the management of the school was not in order and was not the ideal structure. The school had been continuously in and out of special measures. Therefore, the participants would have been used to the pressure in terms of other aspects of school improvement which were all top down decisions. It would appear that their core business did not change for them and so their perception of becoming an academy meant that there would be more funding and opportunities available. It was seen by these participants as a decision to be taken at a managerial level which consequently, to them, meant finances, budgets and resources to 'fund failing schools, to give them an injection of money and new buildings' (Head of Year 7, School-3).

School-1 was a well-managed converter academy achieving highly and therefore the aim for very few of their participants was financial. The Principal felt that finance was the aim for academisation to take place which was perhaps expected given that he had to be responsible and accountable for the budget. He felt that academies were introduced as an

investment of capital, usually with a significant proportion of new build, usually with a new name and new uniform, a new image and new leadership and staffing (Principal, School-1).

It appears that he identified an opportunity to increase funding, as schools never feel that there are sufficient funds, and always like more. He was not necessarily concerned about the attainment of the pupils given that they were already a successful school, and saw the aim of academisation to constitute an increase in funding which allowed the development of opportunities, prestige for the school and improved facilities to be able to compete with other schools which had academised. Conversely, other participants within the school did not believe that financial gain was the reason for the introduction of academies.

School-2 was divided with half of its participants who believed that the aim behind academies was the need for financial gain and opportunity. The level of seniority providing this response was mixed between the Head Teacher and those holding positions at a senior level. This school was a converter academy and yet its results showed that it was an underperforming school. It therefore goes without saying that any school which is underperforming will always want more resources to be more creative and perhaps support pupils in a different way in order to make a difference to the attainment. Although, there is no evidence to suggest that the freedom enjoyed by academies in turn produces such teaching practices leading to the improved standards and achievement (Gleeson, 2011), yet this goal was thought to be achieved by having 'more control over their finances' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). Therefore, for these participants the financial gain was their aim as they were continually balancing requests from staff for more resources, more staffing, more CPD and more time, all of which could only be achieved through increased finances. It is clear how these participants would see the financial impact of academisation as the aim to progressing from a Local Authority maintained school to an academy. There was an element of importance as to who controlled the finances within what constituted the aim of academies but primarily it was thought that the

government wanted to take some of the monies away from the Local Authorities to give to individual schools whereby they could have sponsors or outside funding to help them (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2).

This accords with Ball and Youdell (2007) and the inception of neoliberalism in public sector education. Neither the Consultant Principal nor the Executive Director saw financial gain and opportunity as the aim for the Academies Act. Both of these participants had a wider view of the programme as opposed to having an isolated view seeing the impacts upon specific individuals in an enclosed environment. It was surprising that this was not mentioned as being one of the aims given that they were both in roles where budgets, and the balancing of them, was extremely important, together with the accountability for this.

#### **4.1.3 Autonomy as an aim for the Academies Act**

Autonomy for schools was the most popular response, the others being attainment and financial gain, as being the aim for academies. Every represented institution had at least one participant who believed that freedom for schools was the aim for academies: 'It is to give schools more freedom and flexibility so the pupils benefit' (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1). This accords with Woods (2011). Autonomy for academies was the key aim of the Act, in particular, in relation to curriculum (Queen's Speech, 2010). This was a governmental decision whose aim was 'to give schools more autonomy' (Assistant Principal, School-1) and to dissolve local control (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). However, the retention of government

control over the judgement of schools creates tension between the driver to improve attainment, the granting of autonomy to schools and verification that the system works by maintaining control over the inspection of standards (Zajda, 2006).

Half of the participants in the three converter academies thought that academisation brought along freedom for the schools. This response was not exclusive to any one particular level of seniority within a school. Two of these schools were very successful in terms of pupil attainment and were well managed; one of these schools was underperforming, yet on the road to recovery with its leadership structure and improvement plans. Academisation was to give schools more 'freedom to govern themselves' and be in charge of their own decisions rather than being answerable to a face-less Local Authority (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1). These schools were clearly able to assist pupils in producing good outcomes for them or they had the leadership attributes to be able to assist in the development of it. Therefore, academisation seemed to be the next developmental stage for the schools as it was related to the freedom for schools enabling them to be masters of their own destiny (School-4). This allowed schools to be omnipotent in their decision-making, being able to shape the future of the school by those who knew the school, its pupils and its needs, thus responding to local circumstances, using innovation as opposed to being dictated to by governmental rules and regulations (McNally, 2015). 'The idea was to take away authority from the local education authorities and put it in the hands of the individual schools' (Deputy Head Teacher, School-4). Academisation may have allowed the schools to end their feeling of being constrained by the bureaucracy and the restrictions imposed upon them by Local Authority control. They were unable to advance the school and adapt to ever-changing society without embarking upon the academisation process and to be freed from the constraints of the Local Authority.

The Executive Director believed that autonomy, together with the raising of attainment, was the aim of academies. She felt that autonomy could be perceived to be the aim of academies as schools were not constantly answerable to the Local Authority, and were free to source resources. However, the reality was that schools which were not academies were no more restricted by the Local Authority, in terms of bureaucracy, than academy schools. This was because the Executive Director had a duty of care to the children in any environment under her jurisdiction and as previous legislation had not been repealed, that duty still existed. Therefore, even though she believed the aim to be autonomy, it was disguised as the duty of care is still underlying. Though academies are

free from the Local Authority rein and actually currently the schools which are maintained schools aren't any more governed than the academies really, so it is a bit misguided really. They have never repealed the 2004 Act which means that I still have statutory duties to all children in any setting (Executive Director).

The Consultant Principal listed autonomy as the aim of academies and that the existence of academies was to enable schools 'to move away from the Local Authority' (Consultant Principal). It is evident from his role that when he was visiting schools, whether to support or to lead them through academisation, the majority of people were in a position where control was either being given or taken away from them. Therefore, it is easy to understand why he stated autonomy as the aim of academisation. As he was not based in any particular school, he saw the impact of academisation when a school had undergone the process. His role when supporting schools was very much based upon restructuring staff and taking and nurturing existing staff through a process, all of which was based upon freedom and autonomy depending upon the roles each individual was given within the organisation. He spent much of his time guiding leadership teams as to how to manage a school without the Local Authority input and how to deal with the new freedom and decision-making processes.

Very few participants from School-3, the sponsored academy, specified freedom as a priority in the academisation process. The Vice Principal who was involved in making a large



proportion of decisions believed that freedom was an aim for the Academies Act 2010. This availability of freedom was reiterated by other participants. The freedom referred to was the freedom to instruct specialists in their areas to ensure progress was maintained so that 'we can now bring outside help in a lot more than when we were a Local Authority school' (Head of Year 7, School-3). The alternative to this was, going through Local Authority channels, and requesting specialists to work with the school. However, because of Local Authority involvement this was prevented because of financial constraints or it was not possible to focus on that particular area at that time. In addition, there were decision makers in higher positions of authority connected with the Local Authority making decisions which were not personal or appropriate to the school or its needs.

The participants chose autonomy as the aim perhaps due to the school-wide focus upon pupil attainment and the improvement of outcomes for pupils. The autonomy on the part of the academies does not only stretch to curriculum content, but also to the way in which it is delivered. This ties in with the financial advantages as it allows academies to be creative in terms of what and how education is delivered, to ensure it is appropriate for the pupils in a particular academy in order to raise standards (Curtis et al., 2008). Maintained schools are restricted in the amount of freedom they are able to give to their staff which in turn restricts the innovation used by staff. Academies do not have such restraints and thus innovation is unrestricted (Purcell, 2011).

## **4.2 Lived experiences of stakeholders in a school undergoing academisation**

The lived experiences of stakeholders affected a number of areas of school life: finances, attainment, pupil behaviour, curriculum, autonomy, impact on staff, collaboration, continuing professional development, intake and exclusion and ethos. These are discussed below.

### **4.2.1 The financial impact of academisation**

The majority of participants saw an impact on the financial position of the school following academisation. Some participants only saw a positive impact; very few saw only a negative impact and some saw a positive and negative impact. There was more of a positive impact seen in the converter academies overall than in the sponsored academy. It was accepted that not all schools benefitted because 'a lot of schools have had more cash'; but not all (Consultant Principal). The possibility for all schools to apply to become academies widened the gap between schools as it enabled both successful and failing schools to develop further because successful schools are able to access the same funding as failing schools. However, with the aid of similar funding, the gap will still exist and, in some cases could widen, because successful schools may have a grounding which allows its pupils to make more of the funding and resources available (Gorard, 2009). The additional funds provided to non-failing schools fuelled the competition between them and failing schools (Gorard, 2011). Therefore, even if all schools saw some positive impact upon its finances, the ultimate effect and impact would have been greater in the successful schools which academised because in general they started in a stronger position in terms of attainment, staffing and culture. If all schools have benefited, then the gap will either stay the same between the successful and failing schools or widen further.

The positive impact upon the school's financial position was seen by a Principal who understood that 'most of the money came from the government but they were looking for outside sponsors to support with some money or expertise' (Principal, School-1) This follows the DFE's (2014b) thinking regarding the opportunity to use a sponsor's expertise to develop the academy. This injection of finance would give more flexibility in respect of payments to teachers and, as a school, there was the opportunity to develop those areas which were in need of development, and spend money on those areas, as opposed to being instructed by

the Local Authority where money should be spent. At a senior level, the positive impact upon finances was seen: prior to academisation the school would be very frustrated when they saw that money disappeared and they did not receive the services which had been promised. In addition to the money disappearing, the school was unable to reallocate the funding to areas which they thought needed it more. An example of this was given when School-1 had to request to have the athletics track marked out which was carried out under Local Authority allocation of time for the workforce. The season was over before the track had been marked out. Therefore, not only had the school not had the track marked out but they had also paid for a service which they had not received when it was needed. Consequently, the freedom that academisation brought with it allowed the school to employ its own premises team and to receive the service on time for which they paid. The freedom brought with academisation allowed School-2 to have a 'greater ability to direct resources to where I want them to go to suit the needs of young people' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). Therefore, not only was School-2 able to choose where to spend the money but it was able to consider the needs of individuals and the overall needs of the school to make its decision. The Executive Head Teacher of School-2 enjoyed the flexibility in terms of finances and decision-making but did not believe that there was a huge financial benefit to academisation. Very few participants in School-2, with less seniority and less involved in the decision-making, believed that as a school it was financially better off. This was perhaps due to the flexibility given to those making decisions so that they were able to spend where it was necessary and therefore more of a positive financial impact was seen by others across the school.

School-3 had been in and out of special measures and thus needed the financial injection in order to be able to make a difference and benefit the pupils. School-3 was a sponsored academy and therefore had an added advantage in that it was not only an academy receiving the freedom of funding but also had the support of the sponsor. Some of the finances came from the sponsor to facilitate the improvement of the school to come out of special measures. However, this raises the question that if the additional finance was necessary to help the school to come out of special measures and it succeeds as a result of it, then once the funding is no longer available because the sponsor needs to invest more money into a different school, will the standards in the school drop and will it be back in special measures? Was it only a short-term fix? No participants of School-4 saw a solely positive financial impact.

The participants who saw a negative financial impact were from School-2 and the Executive Director. Prior to academisation, staff would have ordered resources and not been questioned as to whether or not they really needed them. However, since academisation 'we are made aware all the time of costs, whereas before we would just put an order in and we would have it' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2). This is a different lived experience to the Executive Head Teacher which shows that those who are in a position of leadership and management have perhaps a different experience to those who receive the direction from the management. The introduction of pupil premium has meant that the school has had to be more aware of its spending and has had to justify its spending. This may have been as a direct result of academisation or as a result of being accountable generally for pupil premium funding. The Executive Director had also seen a negative impact in terms of finances. The Local Authority relinquishes its responsibility for decision-making in respect of finances, handing over the burden to academies to manage their own funds which is a clear advantage for the Local Authority as it is no longer accountable (Thomas, 2016). This differs from the Executive Director's perspective. She stated that when a school converts to an academy, if it has a surplus, then the surplus goes with it. Usually when a school is sponsored and becomes an academy the surplus goes to the Academy Trust. If a sponsored academy has a deficit, then this is passed on to the Local Authority; a converter academy must repay this to the DFE which reimburses the Local Authority (DFE, 2015d). Therefore, the Executive Director was '£350,000 out of pocket for general children's services' in that particular year because there had been two schools which had converted to academies and they both had deficits (Executive Director). This is a different lived experience to some of those participants working in a school.

She had to soak up the deficit in her budget and absorb it across the Local Authority as she had no budget for academy deficits. This means children in general were being disadvantaged by the conversion of some schools. She accepted that finances were necessary to improve standards and a way to do this was for some schools to become academies. However, some children were going to suffer as another part of the budget had to be cut to absorb the academy deficits. The financial advantage for the Local Authority (in losing its financial responsibility to the school regarding the removal of decision-making with potential savings and the financial gain for academies provided they are managed well) could be a double-edged sword in particular if the academy is sponsored and has a deficit (DFE, 2012a).

Many participants had mixed feelings about whether they had seen a positive or negative impact financially on the school. The perception by participants of larger academy chains was that 'the bigger ones have become businesses and it is more of a money-making scheme than it is about pupils' (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1); whilst at the same time in School-1 the freedom to use the finances as it chooses has meant that more small group intervention has been possible to improve standards. Although the school was able to choose which resources to spend the budget on to secure its own services, there were constraints from managerial staff as to how models were developed. Therefore, the restraints were still in existence for the teacher in the classroom, but it was a different group of people making the decision, although the decisions were holistically more individualistic and pupil-focused for the individual school than when the school was under Local Authority governance. There was more work for the school now during the procurement process as the Local Authority had done this in the past. Academies have to go through the processes which are undergone in the private sector using private sector methods to obtain services (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). However, this was perhaps a small price to pay given that products and services could be purchased more cheaply: 'it's simple things like insurance which we can now get a third cheaper, which makes you wonder where the rest of the money went' (Vice Principal, School-1). School-3 saw an immediate positive financial impact in terms of money and time but 'that then stops and I feel that we are feeling the impact of that now' (Senior Leader, School-3). This is a different lived experience to the schools which were in a better academic position pre-academisation. This school was in a difficult position because it had a decrease in intake which in turn affected the funding. Thus, additional funding was needed to ensure it had sufficient funds to be able to assist itself in getting out of special measures and 'as soon as the funding goes we get stretched again' (Alternative Curriculum Teacher, School-3). This was a vicious circle as the funding meant more resources to enable the school to focus upon the improvement of standards.

For School-4 there was no definitive positive or negative financial impact. Initially, the school received a cash injection, but subsequently it experienced a stressful time for preparing budgets which would previously have been prepared by the Local Authority. The budgets were decreased nationally and therefore this impacted upon the school and it 'probably had even less [than if we had] remained with the Local Authority' (Deputy Head Teacher, School-4). In terms of pounds in the bank, initially, School-4 saw a positive impact but quickly this funding was squeezed. Therefore, the school still had the advantage in terms of autonomy over finances although it just did not have increased concrete funding. Further, it still had the flexibility to maintain and improve educational standards and extra-curricular activities but it had to be more selective in the resources it had chosen. Academies were not able to borrow and were not able to return to the Local Authority for help. Taking this idea to the extreme, Local Authority maintained schools had resources which they were able to access and therefore it was believed that Local Authority maintained schools were:

more generously funded than academies because they had access to additional sources of finance that perhaps academies can't tap into (Head Teacher, School-4).

Therefore, it would appear that becoming an academy is a double-edged sword; there are advantages financially in terms of the autonomy over finances but academisation does not necessarily mean increased funding.

#### **4.2.2 Pupil attainment**

A few of the participants believed that they had seen a positive impact upon pupil attainment since academisation. These participants felt that there had been an improvement in pupil attainment which had occurred since academisation and therefore the improvement was attributed to the school becoming an academy which accords with Freedman's (2010) view. Research findings do not support this position. The findings of Hutchings and Francis (2017) demonstrate that the impact of academies is variable and dependent upon the focus group of children being compared and whether the academies involved are sponsored or converter academies. Hatcher would support the position that academisation does not equal better attainment (Hatcher, 2006). There was always the feeling that there was pressure from the government and educationalists to improve standards in a school, but these participants felt that it was not just the improvement which one would expect with the external pressures, but it was in fact the academisation which had made the difference. These participants' beliefs were unsupported following consideration of the data, reports and statistics which do not necessarily show a correlation between academisation and improved attainment (Ofsted, 2015a).

There was only one school (School-1) where the improvement in pupil attainment was not mentioned as having been an area where a positive impact had been seen. Some participants felt that they had seen improvements in pupil attainment but that it could not be attributed to academisation as they were constantly striving to improve and thus the improvement would have taken place whether the school academised or not. The participants in this school had similar lived experiences. In School-1, nearly all participants said that they had not seen an improvement which could be accounted for by the mere fact that the school had become an academy. The academisation was seen as an administrative process to run the school in a more efficient way; 'to me academy is a status, I don't think that it would have made a difference to attainment, the students would have achieved the same regardless of the status of the school' (Vice Principal, School-1). This contradicts Rayner et al.'s (2017) research where academisation is seen as a restructuring of the system and not just a legal and administrative process. School-1 was a very high performing school where the staff was committed to constantly improving performance and pupil attainment. Therefore, the academy status of the school was a change which occurred without staff seeing a difference in how they drove pupils to achieve their potential. The Principal believed that pupil attainment:

has improved significantly, but I wouldn't put that down to becoming an academy. It would have happened anyway because we were on a mission to improve' (Principal, School-1).

However, the Principal also believed that the mechanisms within the academy system gave schools more flexibility and independence 'whereby on balance there's more success in the system' (Principal, School-1). Therefore, whilst he did not attribute the improvements to academisation, he acknowledged that there had been improvements which were allowed by the systems instilled by the academy structure.

Very few participants accepted that

the results have gone up since we started [and] the attainment has definitely improved, whether that is to do with becoming an academy I don't know; it would be difficult to say, but I have seen a change (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1).

Clearly there was an acceptance that the change to becoming an academy could have influenced and assisted the improved pupil attainment. In the year of academisation the school achieved 83% A\*-C including English and Maths. In the following years these figures gradually decreased. This perhaps did not show a link between improved attainment and academisation. However, upon consideration of the Ofsted reports it appeared that prior to academisation the school was rated Satisfactory (3) and following academisation rated Good (2) overall and Outstanding (1) for leadership and management. It may be the case that Ofsted, a government body, may have preferred the systems put in place after academisation given that academies were introduced by the government and perceived the school to be improved (Ofsted, 2015b).

School-4, which was the highest performing school, also claimed to have not seen an improvement in pupil attainment following academisation. Pupil attainment prior to academisation was seen to be 'already incredibly high' (Assistant Head Teacher, School-4). Available data showed that the school converted in February 2012 with 75% A\*-C including English and Maths and the results gradually improved. The school clearly had high standards prior to academisation and maintained these standards and indeed surpassed them. The participants' experiences did not correlate with the results. This was because as a school they expected a gradual improvement as they continually drove standards forward and therefore an improvement was expected regardless of academisation. The perception of the participants from School-4 was that the aim of academisation was to sponsor failing schools and improve their results. This viewpoint questions why a very successful school became an academy. Clearly these participants have not asked themselves this question. Their emphasis was upon failing schools and schools where:

the Local Authorities were not managing to raise attainments in those areas, and it was a new way of trying to raise attainment in poorly performing schools (Deputy Head Teacher 2, School-4).

There had been an improvement in pupil attainment with high expectations from School-3 since the academisation. 'Since the academisation the exam results did rise steadily, we have seen a gradual upturn' (Senior Leader, School-3). Some data shows that academy schools are improving at a faster rate than non-academy schools (DFE, 2013) though it will depend upon how the schools are compared. When looking more closely and perhaps making a comparison between other schools, academy schools do not necessarily achieve higher standards than non-academy schools (Stewart, 2015). There are academies which are not performing any better than Local Authority maintained schools according to the Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw (EPI, 2018).

The Head Teacher of School-4 stated that academies were for 'under-performing and seriously weak schools and where they have had that rebirth, then it has made a huge difference'. Yet, he believed that: 'we have always been a high achieving school and there is an upward trend' regarding pupil attainment (Head Teacher, School-4). Therefore, responses of School-4 did not relate to the profile of the school. On the one hand participants felt that there was only a need for academies where schools were underperforming and yet the school still academised. There are other benefits of becoming an academy which can be seen in other sections which may explain the reason for this school's academisation. The responses in connection with attainment seemed to be quite defensive as if the attainment was so high prior to academisation that academisation could not have improved it.

Schools 2 and 3 had similar responses where nearly all participants had seen an improvement in pupil attainment since academisation. The Executive Head Teacher of School 2 and 3 confirmed referring to School-2 that the school was 'expecting our predictions to be the best we've ever had' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). The participants saw an improvement since academisation but there was no concrete way of confirming that it was due to the academisation of the school. However, 'I don't think there is any reason why we shouldn't

think the improvement is the academy' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2). School-2's data showed a drop of 8% in A\*-C including English and Maths following academisation. However, it appeared that the participants believed that the results were set to improve. It could be argued that poor results were a legacy from the previous regime and that the effect of academisation would only show its impact in the years to follow. The introduction of new leadership, new regimes and academisation would have impacted upon the school and disrupted already existing systems. The Ofsted reports showed that prior to academisation the school was rated as Good (2) and following academisation rated as Requiring Improvement (3). The second inspection was under a later Ofsted inspection regime, which may have explained the outcome, but it demonstrated the need for the school to drive standards forward and that perhaps academisation had not impacted in the way it had been intended (Ofsted, 2015b). Additionally, it could be argued that the Executive Head Teacher across Schools 2 and 3 did not have the capacity to lead both schools and energies may have been better utilised in improving one school and making it a success as opposed to having a slight impact across two schools.

As the same Executive Head Teacher led School-2, i.e. being the academy, which sponsored School-3, it was in his best interests to believe that there had been an improvement since academisation as this ensured he kept his position and the staff would buy-in to his ethos to work together to achieve more. Thus, the buy-in from staff propelled the improvement. The question would then be would this buy-in have existed prior to academisation and if the answer is negative then the academisation could have instigated the work ethic and goal setting in order to produce better outcomes for pupils. Academisation may have indirectly brought about the improved pupil attainment. Conversely, very few participants believed this and were of the viewpoint that 'the information that's around doesn't necessarily suggest that all schools which are academies have raised their standards' (Assistant Head Teacher, School-2). They argued that academisation and pupil attainment do not necessarily go hand in hand; it could be applicable in some schools, but it would then be difficult to pinpoint academisation as the cause.

Participants in School-3 have seen a big improvement in pupil attainment with:

no underperforming cohorts; we have high expectations of all pupils now; we have to believe and tell that the journey is possible for all of them (Senior Leader, School-3).

This suggested that it was the attitude of the staff towards pupils' learning that effected a change in the attainment. This change in attitude came about as a direct result of academisation where attainment has started to improve over time (School-3). It took a long time for the school to see an improvement in attainment following academisation. The participants alluded to the fact that there had been many leadership changes which had affected the school's development as an academy. However, upon the change of leadership, the results improved dramatically, but then took a dip. Even with a dip the results did not plummet as low as prior to academisation. It is debatable as to whether the improved pupil attainment was the result of academisation or due to good quality leadership. The school upon academisation was rated Unsatisfactory (4) by Ofsted. However, its subsequent inspection showed an improvement and it was rated Requires Improvement (3) (Ofsted, 2015b). The school was clearly already developing but the academisation did not have the impact initially intended as these improvements took place over five years and coincided with the change of leadership as opposed to being a direct result of academisation.

The improvement in attainment resulted from the drive from academy sponsors to continually improve standards 'the pressure on achieving targets is probably harsher in academies' (Alternative Curriculum Teacher, School-3). Therefore, it was not necessarily being an academy which achieved the results, but it was the focus and drive to achieve instilled in staff and thus into pupils. It would appear that being an academy created the setting for motivation and drive to achieve which in turn created the improved attainment. Again, it was difficult for

participants to confirm that it was the academisation which resulted in the improved attainment. However, they acknowledged that they had seen an improvement:

whether or not that is the result of being an academy or whether it is the result of having an excellent executive head teacher who has driven the school on, has appointed the right people and has got a vision for the school (Vice Principal, School-3).

Improved attainment may be attributable to the individuals concerned although those individuals would not have been in post or have been able to do the things that they have without the academisation. Therefore, the improvement could indirectly be related to academisation.

The Executive Director had an overview of Local Authority maintained schools and academy schools both converter and sponsored academies. Therefore, she was able to make a direct comparison between all schools and their attainment. She acknowledged that:

there are some good results from some academies without question; I would probably have to say they were high performing schools anyway, so you would expect them to be performing well (Executive Director).

It would only be possible to show improvements in attainment based upon a school's level of attainment prior to academisation being the marker to demonstrate the development. This was reinforced by the fact that Schools 1 and 4 which were high performing schools prior to academisation did not, on the whole, directly link the improvement of pupil attainment to academisation but to the natural course of driving standards forward which was naturally followed by improvements in attainment. In contrast, Schools 2 and 3, which were underperforming prior to academisation, on the whole saw an improvement. It could be argued that, with the encouragement to drive up standards, improved pupil attainment would follow and that this could have happened without becoming an academy.

We are seeing an improvement coming through academies but equally I have seen improvement in maintained [schools] as well because we have a real push that they are good enough for the kids (Executive Director).

Alternatively, it is debatable as to whether the mechanisms and systems of an academy allow those underperforming schools to carry out the driving of standards where otherwise this would not have been possible if they had continued as a Local Authority maintained school.

Pupil attainment was listed by participants as the second highest aim for academies. However, this does not necessarily mean that this aim was reflected in these participants' schools. It could be argued that they were referring to what they considered the aim of the policy to be generally.

#### **4.2.3 Change in pupil behaviour**

Some participants across all of those interviewed thought that there had been a positive impact on behaviour following academisation, and some thought that there was either no change, or any change was not due to academisation. Therefore, the schools had different lived experiences where behaviour was concerned. Academisation allowed for better leaders: 'leadership, leadership, leadership, academisation does allow better leaders exerting influence over more schools' (Consultant Principal). The effect of academisation meant that the strength of leadership in one school could be channelled into other schools to pass on the expertise and to influence the behaviour of staff and pupils as seen in schools where staff are deployed to other schools to assist in their development.

The majority of participants from School-1 saw no change in behaviour which was attributable to academisation. As this was a converter academy the pupils were already very well behaved and the behaviour for learning was focused upon by Ofsted:

Ofsted came in and said [pupils] are not doing what they should be doing and the teachers are complacent because we have got very well behaved children (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1).

Therefore, the focus was upon the behaviour of the staff as opposed to the behaviour of the pupils and how staff could better facilitate learning to enable pupils to have better behaviour for learning as opposed to being well behaved. Behaviour trends in School-1 had peaks and troughs but that did 'not correlate to being an Academy' (Principal, School-1). Very few participants thought that the behaviour of staff had changed since academisation as opposed to pupil behaviour 'staff behave in a slightly different way because they know they have the freedom to experiment' in terms of the risks in the style and content of teaching (Vice Principal, School-1). The change which was seen was perhaps not in the pupil behaviour but that they had 'more internal provision for managing' behaviour and therefore the poor behaviour 'dropped quite significantly' (Assistant Principal, School-1).

In School-2, half of the participants had seen a change in behaviour and half had not. The Executive Head Teacher believed that there had been changes but that they were not attributable to academisation: 'I don't think it is as a result of becoming an academy, I think those things would have occurred anyway' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). There was no way of providing definitive proof that the changes would have happened without academisation so the impact of academisation cannot be proved or disproved. The other participants felt that 'behaviour is getting better because the school is improving' (Assistant Head Teacher, School-2). Therefore, this questions whether the improvement of the school was caused by academisation, and, if so, did the improvement in behaviour follow. The perception of behaviour was divided in School-2 and it was very much dependent upon how much contact the participants had in the classroom, or whether they were giving their perception of behaviour based upon being in a role where they analysed data. However, data is only as good as those inputting it and participants, depending on their role, may have a perception of behaviour based upon the data. Those in a position with less seniority saw more of an impact upon behaviour following academisation.

Participants from School-3 unanimously reported a positive impact on behaviour following academisation. This is because prior to academisation the school was so underperforming and the behaviour was so poor that any improvement no matter how large or small would have been noted. Pupils' general attitude as opposed to recorded behaviour had been affected as pupils were 'more polite, appreciative' and staff saw a 'massive improvement' (Senior Leader, School-3). Academisation allowed the school to deal with the behaviour differently and use a variety of management strategies and coping mechanisms which would have been unavailable prior to academisation due to the funding issues: 'we have a really good inclusion unit, which perhaps if we were an LEA school we wouldn't be able to have. We wouldn't have the funding for it' (Head of Year 7, School-3). Due to the increased freedom for academies, a mixed approach to behaviour has been taken ensuring schools are able to focus on areas specific to their schools. The changes in behaviour have not just been small improvements it was 'unrecognisable compared to before we were an academy' (Head of Year 7, School-3). Academisation affected the general behaviour around the school and not just classroom-based behaviour. This continued to affect relationships between pupil to pupil and pupil to staff where 'the behaviour has significantly improved: attitudes, relationships between teachers and students are also markedly improved' (Vice Principal, School-3).

School-4 already had excellent levels of behaviour and therefore academisation was not seen to have impacted upon the behaviour within the school. The Executive Director acknowledged the poor behaviour of the pupils across schools in her area; not all participant schools were



located in the same region. She saw a change in 'the systems in the schools [where] behaviour has always been the same' (Executive Director). Behaviour only improved in schools if pupils had 'clear boundaries, they learn better that way' (Executive Director). Therefore, it was not the improvement in pupil behaviour but the systems in place to deal with it and it was perhaps here where a difference was seen. Academies have less constraints than maintained schools thus enabling them to initiate systems and policies which are bespoke to their schools (DFE, 2014a). The ways in which schools dealt with behaviour have been seen to change where 'some of the behaviours in sponsored schools have had to change as they have got someone else pulling their chains' (Consultant Principal). Academy schools which were sponsored had to 'adopt the operational behaviours and policies of the sponsoring organisation' (Consultant Principal). Therefore, the Consultant Principal saw a change given that sponsored academies had to adopt the systems and management procedures of the sponsor's organisation. It may not be that he saw positive impacts upon behaviour immediately as a direct result of becoming an academy. However, when attending schools in which he advised, he saw a change in behaviour management and approaches to behaviour.

It was clear that there were divided and mixed experiences in respect of whether academisation impacted upon behaviour or not. It would seem that there was less of an impact in schools where behaviour was not an issue prior to academisation

#### **4.2.4 Alterations to the curriculum**

The greater freedom which came with being an academy allowed a change in curriculum which in turn was developed in order to raise standards (DFE, 2011). The change in autonomy over curriculum given to a school when it becomes an academy is a priority in the aim of the policy (Queen's Speech, 2010). However, curriculum change was not seen by any of the participants as an aim of the Academies Act 2010. Therefore, this may indicate that participants within their individual schools did not experience curriculum change but this does not reflect the situation for all participants. There was a reform of the education system with an international influence which means that the curriculum variety available to pupils in the UK must be able to stand up against the curriculum provided internationally (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). This competition, internationally, could have been a potential driver for the Academies Act 2010 (BBC News, 2014, Gunter and McGinity, 2014). The creation of academies has created competition among academies whereby academy chains strive to be the best. Thus, the competition element has gone from an international issue to one which is now localised (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015). The introduction of private enterprise in turn encourages competition. Competition usually drives those involved to strive to produce the best product to overcome their rivals. If this is the case, then private enterprise and competition should have a positive impact upon pupils because sponsors and academies should be striving to be the best they can be which ultimately should create a positive experience for pupils (Rowley and Dyson, 2011). This fierce competition reinforced education inequality and the gap between schools has widened along with the increased parental choice (Chapman, 2013, Ball and Gewirtz, 1994). Conversely, the introduction of academies has produced competition which in turn has forced state maintained schools to perform better (Eyles and Machin, 2015). Whether this was reflected in the perceptions of the stakeholders is another element. It can be argued that most of the curriculum changes would have occurred whether or not a school academised (Gee et al., 2016). The aim behind any curriculum change should always be the raising of standards and therefore if any academies did change their curriculum following academisation it could always be argued that it was done in an effort to raise standards as opposed to being a result of academisation. Therefore, this questions whether any changes which happened to curriculum were because they were necessary or whether being part of an academy meant that, to demonstrate its worth, it needed to make changes even when they were unnecessary. It would appear from the research that the changes, if any, were made for the benefit of the pupils.

A few participants, mostly from School-3 saw curriculum changes following academisation. The school had reverted to a three year Key stage 3 and a two year Key stage 4 model. Despite having the freedom to organise the curriculum in any way the school saw fit, it decided to follow a traditional Key stage 3 three years and Key stage 4 two years format. In addition to this the curriculum changed for year 7 pupils where instead of having:

the full secondary diet, they come in and they have six periods where it is more in keeping with the experience that they would have had at feeder schools' (Vice Principal, School-3).

This enabled the transition from primary to secondary to be smoother; allowing pupils to integrate into secondary school life. This change in approach to curriculum management continued in terms of GCSEs through the use of guided pathways. Parents met with staff from the school to discuss their child's progress in each subject to enable the school, child and parents to make a joint decision as to which pathway the child should take for GCSEs. The school had 89% of parents attending these discussions 'which is the kind of take up that we had not previously seen' (Vice Principal, School-3). The school's approach to pupils who were on the verge of being permanently excluded changed. Instead of removing pupils from school with a permanent exclusion, pupils were kept in school but they were kept away from other pupils and had 'their own unique groups and they have not been taken out of school, so that is a big change' (Alternative Curriculum Teacher, School-3). School-3 has been able to personalise the learning for individuals and groups of individuals to enable them to be taught in a more appropriate setting thus enabling the pupils to remain in school. This bespoke system would not have been possible prior to academisation. It may be that the injection of finance following academisation has allowed schools to change their curriculum and adapt it to the needs of the pupils. The only fear is that schools have set up these bespoke systems with the funding but as the funding disappears the school still has to find a way to fund the system. 'We have seen curriculum changes with it being honed more to what is required and more how we can help the students to perform well' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2). This reaction to pupils' needs is commendable. It is difficult to compare whether the changes in curriculum in each academy have more merit than in the other academies as each one has different characteristics and addresses curriculum specifically to suit its pupils' needs (McNally, 2015). However, it still remains to be seen as to how the funding for this can be sustained. There is a place for policy making as a result of policy analysis and not simply because schools are reacting (Whitty, 2005).

The substantive element of the Academies Act 2010 is such that it will affect and shape the future intake in universities across the country which will have been determined by the curriculum to which pupils have been exposed (Torjman, 2005). Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the schools ensure that they have not changed the curriculum for the sake of it or simply because they felt that, having become an academy, it was the correct thing to do. The curriculum will affect the pupils' future decisions and their ability to compete against other pupils both nationally and internationally. As an overview across many schools, the Executive Director saw a change in the personal health education though she had not seen a change in other areas of curriculum following a school's academisation. This was perhaps because the schools felt that their curriculum was most appropriate for their pupils and ultimately that should be at the crux of any curriculum change so that the pupils' needs are being met.

Curriculum is an area referred to in the Act which allows a wider scope to be covered and with a more innovative approach (Wolfe, 2011). School-1 had been more creative and used its freedom to develop an area of learning called Manglish which was:

English and Maths. I don't think it has altered the curriculum but the way kids are taught is in very much bigger classrooms with two or three teachers and have a bigger class size (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1).

The freedom allowed the school to alter the curriculum by teaching more classes together and using more than one teacher so that English and Maths are taught in the same room at the same time to enable pupils to see the relationship between the two subjects. The ability and flexibility to alter the curriculum to suit the needs of the schools was a key factor in improving standards (DFE, 2011). The freedom given to the school as an academy allowed it to experiment with different curriculum models. This therefore created a mixture of two subjects taught together in a less traditional manner in an effort to improve pupil outcomes as supported by this school's perception of being the main aim of the Academies Act 2010.

Some participants believed that there was no change to the curriculum following academisation or, if there was a change, then it would have happened anyway whether the school had been an academy or not. Nearly all participants from School-1 believed that the curriculum had not changed following academisation. The school had to follow the national guidelines, 'I don't think we have seen any curriculum changes' (Vice Principal, School-1). However, the freedom attached to being an academy allowed the school to develop a more suitable curriculum for pupils: 'our curriculum would have been modified in the way it has been whether we would have been an academy or not' by having the availability of more finances and thus being able to incorporate more use of computing into the curriculum (Principal, School-1). Therefore, the change in curriculum was not perhaps what was taught but how it was taught and the freedom of being an academy allowed that flexibility. There was a call for a new approach to curriculum building to enable academies to maximize the potential in all pupils (Johnebolt, 2014). The school has always followed a traditional curriculum and this did not change following academisation as the school boasted a broad balanced curriculum and personalised it to meet the students' needs. School-4 has also maintained national guidelines.

The participants of School-2 have seen lots of changes: 'we have had lots of changes but I think these would have happened anyway' because the school wanted to improve and therefore took the necessary measures to do so (Assistant Head Teacher, School-2). The Consultant Principal believed that the 'curriculum is in the best interests of the children' and would therefore be adapted as and when necessary. Therefore, he had similar lived experiences to the schools where change to curriculum took place but perhaps it would have happened anyway without academisation. Academies, under Labour's City Academies, were intended to become experts in one particular field to enable pupils to focus and succeed and thus ensure the school was successful (Curtis et al., 2008). However, pupils have always needed, and have been required, to demonstrate a wider knowledge base when applying for colleges, universities and jobs. Therefore, it would be impracticable to force pupils to be such specialists and also it would not be in their best interests.

The participants' views were generally mixed as to whether or not there had been a change in curriculum following academisation or the changes would have occurred anyway because schools are continuously moulding their curriculum to meet the needs of pupils in the ever-changing society. The sponsor's vested interest in a particular school could drive the academies forward in an effort to ensure all pupils are achieving and maximizing their potential. However, if sponsors have too much influence where the curriculum content is concerned then there is a danger that pupils become too focused in one field and are thus disadvantaged when competing against pupils from other academies and schools where they have been exposed to a broad and varied curriculum. It is debatable whether the sponsors of academies are truly motivated to act in the best interests of the general public and future generations (Rowley and Dyson, 2011). Therefore, it is important to ensure that the curriculum is appropriate for the pupils concerned and that it maximizes their potential for their future journey.

#### **4.2.5 Participants' Lived Experiences of Autonomy**

Academies were given autonomy over finances, curriculum, and teaching and learning thus removing the control of the Local Authority. Academies became self-controlling or were controlled through the academy trust. The Academies Act is a horizontal policy controlled by the government which in turn affects the decision-making in the academies. Therefore, freedom is given to academies yet in a controlled manner determining the introduction and implementation of the daily running of the academies (Stewart, 2013).

Many participants believed that they had seen an impact on the autonomy of schools following academisation. The schools were given more freedom to make decisions which were appropriate and specific to the needs of the pupils in their schools. Every sector of participants claimed that in their experience they had seen a positive effect upon the autonomy of schools except for the Executive Director who believed that Local Authority maintained schools are no more regulated than academies.

School-1, which was already in a good position in terms of control from Ofsted, was a high performing school and felt that the reason for its academisation was to gain 'more autonomy' and being an outstanding school the change to allow outstanding schools to apply to be academies worked in its favour, whereas, previously only underperforming academies have converted to academies (Principal, School-1). Participants felt that they had more power 'to choose because we are not under the same restraints that we had before and having to deliver certain things, given the limited funding from the authorities' (Vice Principal, School-1). Academisation allowed the school to be exempt from compliance with Local Authority regulations and stipulations as they got 'rid of bureaucracy and the strait-jacket that we were in before with the authority, the freedom is quite refreshing to have as an organisation' (Vice Principal, School-1). Individuals in schools could feel restricted by the systems in schools and the higher up the ladder of seniority, the more restrictions appeared which have emanated from Local Authority directives. Therefore, this freedom injected a new energy into the school to enable the management to make decisions without always feeling that they were constrained into making a decision only within the parameters given by the Local Authority. The school was already very pupil-focused which was shown by the high attainment though academisation did not hinder the school's performance because it gave schools autonomy to make decisions to enhance pupils' learning experience. This meant that the school was able to react to the individual needs of pupils and focus its efforts, decisions and finances on those areas most in need for it as a school. The increased flexibility resulted in the school channelling its resources towards its appropriate focus as opposed to focusing upon an area which was listed by the Local Authority as a priority simply because the Local Authority identified it as a focus across the borough. 'We are able to tailor specifically for our needs more than the Authority because we are different' to other schools within the Local Authority and thus have different needs (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1).

School-2, which was a converter school was performing at a lower level than School-1 and would therefore have had more interference from Ofsted and the Local Authority and consequently had participants who were 'much more aware that we have autonomy' (Assistant Head Teacher, School-2). This freedom was felt by staff at different levels of seniority but mainly by those in a managerial position. The freedom allowed the school to make its own decisions in the same way as in School-1, where decisions were appropriate for its needs. Thus, both schools had similar lived experiences. The staff who was more classroom based, compared with those in managerial roles, would still have felt that decisions were being made by managerial staff. However, they would not necessarily appreciate that the Local Authority was no longer driving those making the decisions. Academisation allowed the Executive Head Teacher to:

be able to say what we want, what we believe is right for our children and without having to have almost the 'big brother' approach from the Local Authority (Executive Head Teacher, School-2).

The freedom given to an academy allowed School-2 to specifically cater for its pupils by making 'adjustments to curriculum and things like times of school day and structure of day' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). The autonomy on the part of the academies did not only stretch to curriculum content but also to the way in which it was delivered which tied in with the financial advantages. Therefore, it allows academies to be creative in terms of what and how education is delivered to ensure it is appropriate for the pupils in any one particular academy in order to raise standards (Curtis et al., 2008). The school did not have to enter into long discussions and debates with the Local Authority before making changes thus decreasing the amount of time for which the change could impact upon pupils. The autonomy enabled the school to be more pupil-focused.

All participants in School-4 felt the impact on the school having more autonomy following academisation by being able to 'choose our own destiny' (Assistant Head Teacher, School-4). The school already had a 'very light touch from the Local Authority' (Deputy Head Teacher 2, School-4). However, previously, decisions were still Local Authority led despite the school's high performance thus highlighting the fact that all schools were under the same control from the Local Authority despite their track record of performance. From a managerial aspect the concept of academisation was to remove Local Authority control and give power back to the schools. Academisation is not a revolution of the education system but instead is a focus upon reducing the elevated position of local authorities and emphasising the control and importance of private enterprise (Glatter, 2011). This independence enabled the school to shape its staffing structure; promoting more staff by 'having extra promoted posts, slightly different working conditions' (Deputy Head Teacher 1, School-4). These freedoms led to autonomous decisions made at a senior level within the school, whereas previously the Local Authority would have been involved which would have meant a lengthy process and a generalised position as opposed to being specific to the school. School-4, like Schools 1 and 2, had the freedom with the 'complete break with the Local Authority and that has enabled us to focus on the needs of our own students' (Head Teacher, School-4). The school had been able to identify weaknesses and strengths and address those in their own way as opposed to being directed by the Local Authority which then constricted the approaches to address those needs: it is being given the freedom to really identify what the needs of our local students are and to address those needs without someone saying you can't do that because it isn't one of our priorities (Head Teacher, School-4).

Academisation allowed the school to create and drive its own priorities to maintain and drive continual improvement so that the 'freedoms benefit the schools and the children. The best ones have become more entrepreneurial' (Consultant Principal). It has allowed schools to be creative and to use the status to their advantage for the benefit of the pupils.

School-3 was probably the most restricted by Ofsted decisions and the Local Authority prior to its academisation (Ofsted, 2015b). For School-3 being an academy meant that it could really analyse the needs of the pupils and then assess how best to cater for them without the interference from the Local Authority who did not know the individuals concerned. The freedom meant that 'jobs are more creative and you tend to make some bespoke things that you wouldn't necessarily get in a mainstream school' (Senior Leader, School-3). School-3 was in a slightly different position to the other schools because it was a sponsored academy and thus decisions were imposed upon the school in an effort to enhance its performance. Nevertheless, these decisions were made by individuals involved with the school as opposed to the Local Authority who had no contact with the pupils or staff to have a full understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Although the sponsor drove the decisions, staff were still restricted to decisions made by those holding senior positions within the academy sponsor. As a result of the school still underperforming and consequently the high level of restrictions, the view of staff at a senior level was that there was more freedom: 'I think we have got that little bit more freedom' (Vice Principal, School-3). The decision-making was cascaded more in other schools where the head teachers and school leaders believed that the staff were good

enough in their core business of teaching to make more decisions themselves. There was the possibility that by giving individuals too much freedom across the school as a whole resulted in pupils receiving mixed messages which caused confusion and questioned the cohesive approach to drive standards forward as some may have been pulling in a different direction. Therefore, it is understandable that individuals across the school in School-3 had perhaps less freedom than those in the other schools where there is the trust and respect that the staff is competent to know the direction of the school yet is able to individualise the approach.

The biggest shift in schools with the introduction of the academies was the introduction of private enterprise and removal of Local Authority control. Education has undertaken a transformation (Ball, 2007b). According to Richards (2012), Gove has taken away the accountability of the Local Authorities and yet has made academies accountable to him and his successors, and the decentralisation of academies is a product of a central decision. However, the Executive Director disagreed with the total removal of Local Authority control and thus the concept of total freedom as she believed

it is no more free from the Local Authority than you would believe, because things like the Schools' Forum which is the statutory instrument that we have got, academies are expected to be represented on that (Executive Director).

She believed that there was a perceived freedom granted to schools for being an academy. However, the freedom given as a result of the Academies Act 2010 did not take away other statutory obligations and regulations by which schools and academies must abide. Therefore, in her view, there was limited freedom given to academies in a controlled manner.

The concept that having freedom as an academy was a negative result was not really explored by the participants. However, perhaps the level of freedom was too much and the focus upon pupils' learning and the raising of standards has been lost in the concept of academisation and the bureaucracy surrounding it. The freedom of choice, in particular in relation to admissions, curriculum and exclusions, appears to be a key feature of the Academies Act (Rayner, 2015). There is a lack of standardisation across academies and therefore this questions the merit of freedom as there are some pupils experiencing different levels of quality of education due to the flexibility and freedoms granted to academies (EDEXEC, 2012). When the possibility of becoming an academy was opened up to any school the argument that raising standards was the aim of the Academies Act was weakened and the control and removal of Local Authority accountability through the devolvement of powers was a stronger argument. This has reshaped the Local Authority's position within the education sector (Montrose42, 2011). The Local Authority has been permitted to be a co-sponsor of an academy. The Labour government removed its involvement but the coalition government reintroduced it in a different guise and with the input of its expertise where funding agreements are involved (Curtis et al., 2008). The coalition government did not appear to have the same focus upon removal of Local Authority control. This may have coincided with the Executive Director's position where it appears that schools have freedom as soon as they academise but that freedom was measured and controlled with the Local Authority still playing a large role in the education system.

#### **4.2.6 Impact on staff**

Academies introduced the 'timely staff restructuring and appointment of senior teams' (National Audit Office, 2010:1). Academies have autonomy to set the pay and conditions and the calibre of staff who are employed. Prima facie, pupils benefit from receiving teaching from those who purport to offer and are considered, by those responsible for recruitment, to demonstrate the best quality teaching. Conversely, academies could set the pay at such a low level to make savings so that only less qualified staff can work at the school thus impacting negatively upon pupils' learning and attainment. The status of being an academy is believed to protect academies from losing financial support which enables them to maintain standards

(Russell, 2011). However, the flexibility of being an academy allowed schools to create roles which, in the past, would not have been possible due to restrictions from the Local Authority and budgets which were specifically allocated for staffing. Statistically, staff are paid more in academies than in maintained schools (Northen, 2011). The issue of underpayment and appointing less qualified staff so that the schools could pay less did not arise during the interviews. The decision-making on this aspect is taken by the academy trust (The National Archives, 1996). Academies are able to react to the needs of pupils attending the school at any particular time and can be creative and innovative towards their approach to staff and curriculum design (Curtis et al., 2008). The way in which an academy is managed is an essential factor in the success of pupils and the success of the academy as a whole.

Some participants saw a change in the staffing structure following academisation though this change was mostly seen by the participants of School-3 which appeared to have a different lived experience from the other schools. The change in finances and the freedom to procure its own services has meant that School-1 has seen a change in staffing at leadership level. It has needed more staff to control finances and undertake the job of procurement. However, there is a risk that some of the salaries are unjustifiably increased in academies (Downs, 2015). On the other hand, schools are more likely to retain staff where salaries are higher and could also attract better quality staff. The Principal of School-1 explained that 'major restructuring, staffing and leadership' had taken place (Principal, School-1). The flexibility given to the academies means that staffing structures, levels and quality are very much open for discussion and can be individual to the academy (EDEXEC, 2012). The accountability of leadership staff has changed due to the onus of certain roles that have been taken away from the Local Authority and given to the school. It is necessary to have sufficient leaders who can sustain the required level of support to instigate and sustain change (Chapman, 2013). Prior to academisation, there was always a buffer and always the Local Authority to turn to as a safety net. However, that layer of leadership was taken away and passed to the individuals within the school. Therefore, the leadership and staffing roles had to support the changes and freedom given to the school. Personnel in a position to lead or make decisions could either ensure the success of raising standards or could destroy the potential to no longer be a failing school (Freedman, 2010). In School-1 there has recently been the introduction of a new leadership role where the specific remit of the role was data. This allowed the building of capacity although there was always the concern that too many staff in senior positions are recruited with less emphasis on teaching in the classroom (Northen, 2011). Conversely, the school has been able to adapt to the needs for that particular year by introducing the role, with the specific of data, to enhance the leadership area and thus promoted the learning outcomes for pupils.

School-3 saw changes, but again this was at the leadership level in particular as it was a sponsored academy. The leadership was heavily influenced and infiltrated by individuals from the sponsor whereby change is usually seen 'mainly [at] the top end' (Head of Year 7, School-3). Change within the school took place because individuals were given the opportunity to work in different roles following academisation. This enabled staff to gain experience doing different jobs but also enabled the school to establish who was suitable for each role. However, only when the Executive Head Teacher 'arrived, that's when the real change took place' (Vice Principal, School-3). Therefore, it could be argued that it was not the structure which was created due to the academisation which drove change, but 'the success that we had was down to the individuals' (Vice Principal, School-3). Alternatively, it could have been the academisation which allowed the correct individuals to have been appointed with the flexibility allowing variants in remuneration attracting different candidates. The flexibility given to academies allows the structure of the school to be tailored to its needs and the needs of pupils. It also means, that staffing structures, levels of staffing and quality of staff are very much open for discussion and can be individual to the academy (EDEXEC, 2012). In particular the budget could be adapted yearly to allow for the needs of more or less staffing depending

upon the individual needs of pupils in that one particular year, allowing learning experiences which would not necessarily be done in a Local Authority maintained school (School-3).

The change noticed by very few participants in School-4 has been the governance:

because governors are now far more accountable and they have to be well-informed about educational standards, priorities, school improvements, self-evaluation and budget and premises (Head Teacher, School-4).

Many of these areas would not have been relevant in a detailed way to the governors and leadership team in a school but with the freedom given to an academy and the fact that it became accountable for all areas of school life, the individuals at the school had to become experts in all areas. School-4 found that when they needed to reduce staffing numbers once it had become an academy, the process was 'swifter, more robust because we were dealing with people who knew the business and what was needed and were able to offer robust advice' (Head Teacher, School-4). The barriers which the school hit as a Local Authority maintained school when it wanted to reduce staffing were no longer barriers upon academisation as the system in place as an academy meant that the professionals

were prepared to stand up to trade unions, because with HR in the Local Authority very often they were being dominated by the trade unions (Head Teacher, School-4).

The process did not take an 'inordinate amount of time and hassle to get things resolved' (Head Teacher, School-4). The flexibility for the school to source its own services meant that it was not restricted to using the Local Authority which in the past had been restrictive and made it a lengthy process. It could be argued that this was a good move for the school with less time being spent on staffing and more time for pupils. However, from an employee's point of view, the staff felt as though they had less protection than if the Local Authority had been involved (Assistant Head Teacher, School-4). This meant that the school was able to select more appropriate staff and ensure that the members of staff who were not performing could be removed and new members of staff appointed who were more effective.

The Executive Director's experience was that it was positive for the individuals concerned when they are appointed into roles which enable them to take part in school improvement. However, she was concerned that the increased number of executive headships, whereby the Head Teacher leads multiple schools, meant that the individuals were stretched with reduced capacity which reduced their efficacy (Executive Director). A few participants saw no change in the staffing structure following academisation. Interestingly there were very few participants in School-1 who saw any changes and thought 'the structures are the same', yet the Principal was very specific about the structural staffing changes in particular areas of the curriculum provision (Principal, School-1). It was possible that the changes took place without others realising that it was linked to the academisation.

In School-2 participants felt that it was not the academy status which changed the leadership and the only difference was that the Executive Head Teacher was working across two schools. It was accepted that they had a wider base of senior leadership team but that it would have happened with or without academisation as the school would have adapted to the appropriate needs of the school. The changes in staffing were seen to be selective to enable a specific curriculum to be delivered. Therefore, it was the curriculum which drove the changes and not the academisation. It could be said that if the school had not have become an academy then it would not have had the freedom to change its curriculum and thus no necessity to change its staffing, indicating that the change of staff was as a result of academisation. The Executive Head Teacher of School-2, in accordance with Dickens' (2016) stance, acknowledged that there had been changes to staffing where there had been some redundancies and some staff had been promoted to leadership roles but 'I wouldn't have said that was a direct result of academisation' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). Where changes have occurred it was



considered that the changes would have taken place whether academisation had happened or not as it was the best for the pupils in the school at that time. However, certain events following academisation meant that changes to staff could, and needed to, be made so it could be argued that without academisation those events would not have happened and therefore the changes would not have been possible or necessary. This accords with the findings of Keddie (2014) where the process of academisation allowed staffing to be tempered according to the school's needs.

The Consultant Principal saw changes in sponsored academies where they were less confident in their own abilities which would mean that they would need to ask other schools or services for additional support which often resulted in the change in roles. However, schools which converted did not necessarily need change because they had a structure which was successful. Therefore, the sponsored academies needed changes to be made whether they were an academy or not, as change was necessary to help the school to succeed because the academy would only be sponsored if it was underperforming (Consultant Principal). Very few participants were sure as to whether there was a change in staffing following academisation and if there was a change they did not know whether it was due to academisation. School-2 'can go a number of years and have a fairly stable staff and then we can go for a couple of years where there is a lot of movement' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2), as normal practice. This accords with the Executive Head Teacher's lived experience. Therefore, the changes may or may not have been attributable to academisation as changes had occurred in the past prior to the school being an academy.

#### **4.2.7 Collaborative Work**

According to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (2014) academies have allowed the opportunity for schools to work together and support other schools with the aim of improving attainment. However, this is a government supported body and therefore it is inevitable that it would position academies in a favourable light. Prior to the introduction of academies, schools improved through individualised support, action and improvement plans for staff and the school as a whole. There is nothing to suggest that these are not still used to achieve the same result. However, there may be a wider range of resources in terms of personnel and finances which academies can access in order to support staff whereby collaboration produces better results (Chapman, 2013). The additional funding enables academies to channel more of its funding towards the development of staff in an effort to ultimately raise standards. The Local Authority's relationship with academies differs from that with Local Authority maintained schools. There is more of a collaborative relationship with the former as opposed to a master-servant relationship with the latter (Montrose 42, 2011).

Some participants have seen a positive impact of academisation in terms of collaboration and support from other schools, academy sponsors, and other professionals, whereby collaborative work was seen as a definite positive (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014). School-1 was a converter academy and therefore the participants saw the impact of academisation upon collaboration as an opportunity for it to help failing schools where successful schools share their strengths with weaker schools (School-1). This school was already in a strong position and was very successful. Therefore, it did not need to be on the receiving end of support but, instead, became heavily involved in school-to-school support. This is where members of staff from one school are chosen to provide intervention to another school through a variety of methods such as mentoring and workshops (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014). The Principal of School-1 strongly believed 'the notion of school to school support is coming through, in most cases is moving Academies on' and the way to improve schools and academies was to take part in school-to-school support constituting the 'strongest and most formal type of collaborative structure' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013:53). This support and collaboration took place in a variety of ways whereby being a stronger school it was able to help weaker schools (Chapman, 2013). The school was part of a teaching school which meant that through the teaching school

organisation it was assigned various support and collaboration projects with schools which were not so successful. Individuals within School-1 had undertaken courses and training to become Specialist Leaders of Education. The teaching school was able to assign these individuals, with the Principal's permission, to various projects with schools which were either within the teaching school consortium or had paid for support. The negative side to that was that the school needed to ensure that by increasing its numbers of Specialist Leaders of Education, who by the nature of the role were in senior positions within the school, the school did not become short of good quality staff and thus ran the risk of dropping standards. The members of staff who had undertaken these roles experienced systems and teaching methodologies in other schools and thus the pupils of School-1 benefitted from this expertise.

Support was given in a collaborative and collegial way as opposed to being criticised and judged for their failings (Principal, School-2). Academisation has allowed more roles to be developed within the schools in particular at leadership level which has meant that aspiring leaders were able to shadow current leaders. In particular, aspiring leaders were able to participate in small projects of a senior leader on a rotation basis to give them experience and to bring fresh thinking to the leadership projects (School 1 and 3). Therefore, the school did not only experience school-to-school support and collaboration but also more collaboration between the existing staff of the school itself. The flexibility of academisation allowed more roles to be created whereby 'the senior leadership team has got bigger and we have got an extended leadership team as well' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2). It has been a trend that schools have been able to promote individuals to a senior level enabling them to work collaboratively with experienced staff within School-2 which enabled staff to gain experience and the leadership team to see future potential and assist in the school's succession planning.

A large advantage for the participants in School-3 was 'the external support, being able to go and look at other schools that are academies' (Head of Year 7, School-3). School-3 which was a sponsored academy probably saw the most significant change and impact where collaboration and support was concerned. 'We have had a lot of support from the sponsor, in a way I can't remember happening before we were an academy' (Senior leader, School-3). The academisation process influenced the way in which training and support was delivered across the school. It was also recognised that just because the staff worked in a school which was underperforming it did not mean that the staff were underperforming. The underperformance may have been attributed to a variety of elements some of which may have been due to faults in the system and procedures as opposed to skills related. The staff felt that they had 'a wealth of knowledge and we can offer help' (Senior leader, School-3). Therefore, this demonstrated that the collaboration was not a one-way street. The staff did not feel that the support was all from the outside but in fact that the expertise within the school itself could be used to assist improvement with guidance on how to use the expertise. There was also the need on the part of the leadership team to recognise which members of staff needed support and how best to design the support and collaboration among staff. The concept of collaborative working both within academies and between academies meant that schools could retain their own autonomy, functioning alone, but had the added advantage of working together and supporting one another in relation to specific points always having access to a support network (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2016).

Academisation assisted the leadership team in reassessing the strengths and weaknesses of its staff and how best to put the support in place:

I was a pastoral worker and I didn't feel that leadership supported me in any way. The pastoral team do now get the support of the leadership because we all have specific standards and ways of working (Senior leader, School-3).

Therefore, it was necessary to have assistance with the processes necessary to support staff not simply asking other staff to come into the school and dictate how jobs should be carried

out. It was necessary for the support to be carried out in a collaborative and non-threatening way to ensure that all staff felt valued. It was important that the support which was instigated through the sponsor was carried out in a supportive manner: 'when you are in special measures everybody is watching you so you have to make sure that attainment stays up rather than dropping' (Head of Year 7, School-3). Therefore, when the school was Local Authority maintained, staff did not have the opportunity to work collaboratively or experiment with different techniques and take risks because there was always the possibility that they were being judged as opposed to being supported to develop their expertise.

The external support and collaboration with other schools helped staff develop their practice. This time and opportunity to develop was not available when the school was Local Authority maintained. Being part of a sponsored academy allowed staff to tap into the expertise of all other staff across the sponsor's academies. Thus, staff was supported more in their roles which developed their practice in and out of the classroom directly impacting upon pupils' learning. Consequently, the expertise from the academy sponsors enhanced the development of staff, pupils and the journey of the academy towards improvement. However, some sponsors do not have the necessary expertise in education yet are willing to become a sponsor and thus the expertise needs to be sourced from elsewhere (Chitty, 2008). This may hinder the development of an academy or alternatively give the academy a more business focus to enable it to make the most of its financial position whilst obtaining more education-based expertise from other areas. The support was not only for staff but also for pupils where

inclusion courses for the less able students [have been set up] and we have been able to fund and staff that and to create more bespoke courses for our more challenging students (Senior Leader, School-3).

School-2 benefitted from having an Executive Head Teacher and the links which were established. It was acknowledged that if a school academises and is not in a network of schools, then the hardest part may be the 'distance between the school and the Local Authority' because of the lack of support (Vice Principal, School-3). However, School-3 was part of a sponsored academy chain and therefore this support was present from which it benefitted hugely. School-4 was already a successful school prior to academisation and had many systems for staff development in place. However, participants felt it was most noticeable following academisation that there were more opportunities that had been created 'to enable peer to peer support' (Head Teacher, School-4). This accords with School-1's lived experiences. It is evident that successful schools and competent staff still require the reassurance and opportunity to discuss ideas and collaborate to achieve even better results and this was facilitated by academisation.

The Executive Director received support for the transition from having Local Authority maintained schools in the borough to having academy schools whereby other Directors of Education supported each other. This enabled Directors to share their experiences when dealing with academies and the conversion process.

Some of the academies are working with us and have just stepped in to pick up a poor performing, special measures, primary school (Executive Director).

She welcomed this collaboration and assistance given that she recognised the academies were the best qualified to assist in supporting other schools as this was their core business. She said: 'we are constantly having those dialogues; it is not a them and us' (Executive Director). Therefore, for a long time the Local Authority had supported schools, developed individuals and allocated support to assist schools which were struggling or needed help to get out of special measures and now the role had reversed. Academies and the Local Authority were working together to develop schools and in an effort to improve all schools for the benefit of all pupils.

Very few participants had seen a negative aspect of collaboration and support following academisation. It was accepted that academies 'increased and encouraged school support' (Assistant Head Teacher, School-2). However, there were many people employed by the Local Authority to do the very job of school-to-school support and engineer collaborative projects. Many Local Authority employees lost their jobs and the wheel then had to be reinvented. Individuals were being trained with many different new titles through teaching schools for the sole purpose of school-to-school support and yet this was the very job that many local authority employees had been doing and could have fulfilled these roles. There was no necessity to retrain people when there were already personnel who were fully trained having worked under the Local Authority system. While there was no objection to the notion of school-to-school support or collaborative work, the way in which it was done was seen to have been unnecessary when there were already people trained and doing the job:

for 12 years I was that support for the local authority and I think all it has done is reinventing the wheel, so the people I used to work with have now lost jobs which are lying vacant (Assistant Head Teacher, School-2).

There was no necessity to change the system. However, it could be argued that there were many underperforming schools and if the system was working there would not have been any underperforming schools and so a change in the system was necessary.

#### **4.2.8 Continuing Professional Development**

Academisation allowed schools to use the skillset within their own schools or across academy groups, chains or teaching schools thus developing their own staff and helping to develop the careers of others (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2012). A few participants have seen an increase in CPD opportunities and positive movements to receiving more CPD whether that was a result of other members of the academy chain providing the CPD or whether more funds were spent on external CPD provisions. Head teachers no longer had to look to the local authority for support but instead could look to the MATs (Riddell, 2016a). Schools 1 and 3 saw the most impact in terms of CPD expenditure which is interesting given that one was a converter and one was a sponsored academy. School-1 collaborated with other schools to help it intensify the already varied existing CPD opportunities where

we have some joint twilight inset once a year, so we put on workshops between all of the schools that all the staff opt into and we work with the CPD co-ordinators to do that (Assistant Principal, School-1).

Since academisation staff has been given more ownership of their own CPD thus ensuring staff buy-in to the changes and initiatives instigated at a senior level as it is the responsibility of academies to provide the staff development previously provided by the Local Authority (NASUWT, 2016). For School-3 'CPD, it's all been positive' (Head of Year 7, School-3). The CPD provided since academisation has been more bespoke to ensure staff received the appropriate CPD for their role and to meet their needs: 'we were all offered training specific to our different roles, not the sort of thing that I got before' (Senior Leader, School-3). The school identified the needs of staff and thus used this to tailor the CPD programme. School-3 was a severely under-performing school which needed to identify development opportunities in order to improve standards quickly, which it appeared to be doing.

School-2 which recognised that it still had a long way to go to improve itself was a converter academy which put in place 'intense CPD' using a 'professional partner programme' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). The school took the time to identify the strengths and weaknesses of staff and then paired staff together so that someone who had strengths in one area could help to support another member of staff who was weak in that same area. The school also used this form of CPD as a step towards the formal capability process. Therefore, it was instigated to initially support staff and give CPD opportunities yet if no improvement was

seen after six weeks 'I would pursue informal capability followed by capability, and if that didn't happen you would be out of a job' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). This entailed informal capability of a further six weeks with a support partner followed by formal capability procedures in accordance with Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) (England) Regulations 2012 (The National Archives, 2012). This school recognised that it needed to improve and it used the CPD opportunities which have been opened up due to being an academy to ensure staff received the appropriate support and if they did not perform then they had to leave. However, 'very few staff here through professional partners fail to get better' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). This implies that there are members of staff who have had to leave due to capability issues.

School-4 being the most successful school had seen positive effects of academisation in terms of CPD input. However, the school had 'a strong tradition of supporting from within' (Head Teacher, School-4). Hence, this school had a different lived experience from the other schools. Since academisation there had been a 'bigger role for schools in teacher professional development' (Lupton and Thomson, 2015:12). The Head Teacher was an HMI and valued CPD:

if we don't invest in the staff and CPD we don't enable colleagues to go out and meet with other teachers [in order to] find out how they do things differently (Head Teacher, School-4).

It was only the Head Teacher who raised the positive impact on CPD and perhaps this was because the importance of CPD was already prevalent and an important part of the school culture prior to academisation and academisation has reaffirmed its importance. Neither the Executive Director nor Consultant Principal expressed their experiences in respect of CPD possibly because it was not an element of academisation or school life with which they were involved.

#### **4.2.9 Intake and exclusion**

Choice allows more flexibility when considering those pupils who should be included in the intake of the school and those who need to be excluded (Gorard, 2009). Intake and exclusion within a school needs to be balanced otherwise some schools would be extremely oversubscribed and others in a financial position where closure could be imminent due to dwindling numbers. Therefore, excluding a pupil from one school could mean finding a place at another school but at the same time taking one pupil from another school in return, thus maintaining a balance across schools in one area regarding intake and exclusion. This will of course affect and shape the behaviour policy in terms of what will be the ultimate sanction. There is scope for flexibility and variance in the Act regarding admissions and exclusions which is individual to each academy (Wolfe, 2011). According to The White Paper, The Importance of Teaching, the introduction of the pupil premium would have the likely effect of encouraging schools to enrol more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (West, 2015). However, it was clear from the research that some of the schools' catchment areas were self-determining in how much the parents wanted to make an effort to change to another school as opposed to keeping the status quo of the family tradition by attending the local school. The premise for all academies is still the existence of the Every Child Matters initiative resulting in the Children Act 2004 which each academy must take into consideration when examining the admissions and exclusions (The National Archives, 2004). However, as previously stated, British values and the unseen child are also a focus for all those in the system of education (DFE, 2014c, Ofsted 2013). A school's intake can change when becoming an academy through covert or overt selection processes which can be based upon attainment and aptitude (Gorard, 2009). This could then widen the gap between failing and successful schools in addition to the additional support and funding which is available for academies. The intake in turn affects the school attainment data (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). However, it was apparent from the research that this was not really an issue explored by the participants as being an

area of contention. Intake did not seem to be affected in the way that may be imagined when the Academies Act 2010 is first read and, in particular, where the element of choice enables a selection of pupils to be undertaken. It was clear from the research that the participant schools did not use the selection process to such an extent that there had been a noticeable effect on pupil attainment.

A few participants saw no change in the exclusion and intake rate for schools following academisation. It really depended upon the starting point of the school and the pattern which was instilled prior to the academisation. Some participants saw a positive effect on the intake and exclusion rates. Again, this depended upon the school and its position prior to academisation and in addition the perception of the individual participant which was affected by his or her role. It was evident that some participants were answering from their perception of the situation following academisation and some were answering based upon factual evidence and data of which they had knowledge.

School-1 had 'always been very oversubscribed and that trend has continued almost exactly' (Principal, School-1). The academisation of the school did not negatively affect its intake and in fact only a few participants thought that it had slightly increased. More participants thought that the number of exclusions had reduced, as opposed to there being no change in the rate following academisation. There appeared to be a pattern across schools where there would be a period in which the school would have zero tolerance on a particular type of behaviour which prompted an increase in exclusions. These periods of zero tolerance went through cycles and could not necessarily be attributed to the academisation of the school. In School-1 the number of exclusions went from 42 to 200 at the time when there was a zero-tolerance approach to disrespectful behaviour. The question is whether conversion to an academy had instigated the move towards zero-tolerance or whether there would have been a zero-tolerance approach without academisation. The school did not have an issue with bad behaviour prior to academisation and therefore the zero-tolerance data cycle gave a false impression. It would appear that in School-1 the zero-tolerance approach was not as a result of academisation; it was simply an approach which was taken regularly. The managing mechanisms in the school for behaviour have changed drastically. Prior to academisation it would have been a priority to remove a disruptive pupil from school but following academisation the strategy was to ensure that, as far as was possible, the pupil was able to stay in school. The flexibility and resources to enable this to happen were facilitated by the school since becoming an academy.

Nearly all participants of School-2 saw academisation as a positive move for intake and exclusion rates. However, the Executive Head Teacher did not think that 'there has been any discernible difference between things like exclusions, fixed term or permanent as a result of being an academy' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2). One would presume that the Executive Head Teacher of a school would have all of the facts and figures, data and analysis to hand. Therefore, there seemed to be some discrepancy between what the Executive Head Teacher considered to be the position in terms of intake and exclusion and the perception of other staff who worked at the school. The notion of zero tolerance appeared again in School-2. In the past the school had been told by the Local Authority that it was not allowed to exclude. However, upon becoming an academy this restriction was lifted and therefore there were more exclusions during any chosen period of zero tolerance. The freedom of becoming an academy allowed the school to be in a position where they were able to 'exclude when we need to but it is the very last straw' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2). Thus, the lived experience of this teacher differs slightly to that of the Executive Head Teacher. There were other behaviour management systems in place which meant that exclusions were delivered as a last resort. Therefore, academisation gave the school the freedom to manage its behaviour and exclusions as it felt necessary rather than the school being treated the same as all schools in the borough, and not allowed to exclude pupils, which may not have been appropriate for its pupils. The impact of being able to exclude with less restrictions created the impression

that exclusions had reduced because there was no longer such a fight to exclude a pupil and the school was able to use its professional stance as to when it was appropriate. The additional behaviour management systems appeared to have assisted and prevented a number of exclusions, which in the past would have been referred, thus making a decrease in exclusions. The intake for School-2 did not seem to change. The parents of the area were not in a position to assist their children in travelling a greater distance every day to go to school. Therefore, the majority of parents chose the school for their children simply because of its convenience and location. In addition to that, many siblings and earlier generations of families attended the school and the tradition continued with most families.

Nearly all participants of School-3 believed academisation had helped to reduce the exclusion rate: 'the exclusion rate has dropped tremendously even the small fixed term exclusions' (Senior Leader, School-3), like School-2, School-3 had different ways of dealing with and managing behaviour which they did not have prior to academisation, which resulted in a reduced number of exclusions. The school's focus was to get pupils back into learning as quickly as possible. Participants from School 3 believed that the decrease in the exclusion rate was as a direct result of the change in the stages of the behaviour policy which focused pupils upon learning as opposed to their negative actions. Choice allowed more flexibility when considering which pupils should be included in the intake of the school and which pupils needed to be excluded. This of course affected and shaped the behaviour policy in terms of what would be the ultimate sanction. There was nothing to suggest that this change may not have occurred had the school not have academised. Various elements such as freedom and autonomy, the sponsor influence and injection of finance allowed the school to reassess its position in respect of pupil intake and exclusion. Immediately prior to the school's academisation, there was a ban on exclusions. Therefore, there was the feeling that the exclusion rate had not changed that much from that point. Thus, there were participants who compared the rate of exclusions which took place quite a while before academisation when the school was excluding pupils if necessary, and others who compared it to immediately prior to academisation. However, whichever way participants analysed, it appeared that there was a decrease in the exclusion rate following academisation. A similar pattern occurred as in School-2 when the Executive Head Teacher arrived at the school:

we had a period where exclusions short and fixed term were significantly increased and they needed to be because we had to put that marker down (Vice Principal, School-3).

However, since that point the exclusion rate has decreased so dramatically that the Local Authority has been looking at the school's model as a good model for other schools. The school's intake was quite similar to that of School-2 where there have been dips in the intake but they were due to the natural demographical changes that any school goes through over a number of years. The community tended to be loyal to the school irrespective of its Ofsted judgement or results. Therefore, there was very little chance of parents choosing to send their children to another school simply because it became an academy.

School-4 was a very successful school with no behavioural issues where 'permanent exclusions happen approximately one every three years' (Head Teacher, School-4). Therefore, there was no impact upon the exclusion rate following the school's academisation. However, there was a positive impact in terms of the intake for the school. The school had a good intake, and prior to academisation there were always a few pupils who wanted to attend the school, but because of the numbers allocated by the Local Authority, they were prevented from attending. However, following academisation this issue no longer existed because the school was allowed to adjust their teaching groups accordingly with the flexibility of being an academy and the additional pupils were enrolled. This is a slightly different lived experience to that of the other schools.

Both the Consultant Principal and Executive Director acknowledged that when a school had a new Head Teacher and there were new systems and policies, the school tended to have zero tolerance on one particular point. This forced up the number of exclusions but once the new Head Teacher had made his or her expectations clear then the number reduced again. This is a similar lived experience to that of the Vice Principal of School-3. This increased exclusion rate goes hand in hand with a new Head Teacher and not necessarily with a school becoming an academy. As many schools which have academised had a new Head Teacher, the two seemed to go together, but the increased exclusions were not necessarily caused by the academisation. Following the period of zero tolerance, the exclusions then dropped; thus, the initial increase seemed to have a positive impact in the longer term. The fair access policy via the Local Authority still existed which most academies and schools seemed to have signed up to and 'there is only one [in my borough] that has been a bit difficult about pupils' (Executive Director). This demonstrates that even though academies have the flexibility in terms of the intake and exclusions, they still appreciate the need to be part of such a policy to ensure that they can freely move pupils from their academy to another should the situation arise and, without being part of this, it prevents them from so doing. Therefore, if they want to benefit from the availability to request pupils' removal to other academies or Local Authority maintained schools, they have to accept that they need to be flexible in accepting pupils from other schools.

The intake across all four schools has changed very little, if at all. Despite parents being aware that schools had more freedom in the choices which the schools make for their children, this has not increased or decreased the intake in determining where parents wish to send their children. The freedom of choice must either not be a priority for parents or they must trust schools implicitly, whether the school is an academy or a Local Authority maintained school, to function effectively and make decisions in order to help to produce the best possible outcomes for their children. The initial marketing point for academies was the choice parents would have in respect of where their children would be educated. However, this was an illusion following the introduction of rules and regulations (TLTP Education, 2013). The choice has been transferred from the parents to the academies. The autonomy and freedom of the academies is such that these decisions can be made without consultation (Mansell, 2016a).

#### **4.2.10 School Ethos**

It was not possible to obtain literature and policies from the schools prior to academisation regarding each school's vision or ethos. Therefore, the literature and policies obtained were only used to triangulate the school's current vision or ethos with evidence from empirical research, as opposed to making a comparison between pre-academisation and post-academisation visions.

School-1 had not changed its vision or ethos 'but it is more confident' (Principal, School-1). The school knew that it had been on the right track with its prior successes, and therefore the academy status and the flexibility which it brought with it meant that it could progress with confidence and take more risks. The school had always had an aspirational culture for pupils which was celebrated. Academisation did not change what the staff did but 'there is a slight shift in mind-set' appreciating that the school had become autonomous and could be proud of its achievements:

when compared with similar schools, we are consistently performing amongst the highest in the country on a number of measures, a fact that we are incredibly proud of (School-1's website).

Academisation has allowed the school the freedom to 'reinforce the ethos' because the restrictions no longer applied and the obligation to provide a certain diet of learning disappeared together with the restricted Local Authority budget (School-1). The ethos changed in that the school had always believed in the family atmosphere, building a culture of



experience, aspiration and success. Following academisation the school was able to reinforce this and be more creative about how this atmosphere and culture was developed whereby 'we work in partnership with students and parents to ensure the very best academic achievements for all our students' (School-1's website). There was also the belief that the ethos of the school had not changed following academisation as there had always been a strong ethos and vision (Assistant Principal, School-1). This accords with the Principal's lived experience. The only change referred to was the introduction of a new corporate logo in the form of a learning strategy which encouraged pupils to be more active in their learning. This was viewed as a mere change of emphasis to convey to the pupils that they needed to be active learners as opposed to passive learners, because the vision stipulates that the school is 'a dynamic community that promotes enjoyment in learning' in which pupils were active (School-1's website). The change of school name was not drastic neither were the changes to the logo as the school did not want to lose its already strong identity and ethos because it had become an academy. Therefore, it was possible that some participants who saw no change were looking at the physical outcomes of change as opposed to the intrinsic aspects of ethos and attitude and how the school was able to reinforce it following academisation.

School-2, a converter academy, was underperforming and one would presume that it would have needed to have changed its ethos in order to start an improvement journey. However, it was felt that 'the things that we value, we have always valued' (Executive Head Teacher, School-2); though the school accepted in their ethos statement that there was 'no complacency, no compromise' (School-2's website). The core principles of the school did not change, but how it portrayed them and emphasised them to pupils changed slightly, as they were made more explicit, and reinforced more by the leadership team. The uniform changed but that was prior to academisation and as a direct result of pupils saying that they did not feel smart enough when attending activities with other schools. Therefore, this change would have occurred whether the school was to be an academy or not. Other participants agreed that the ethos had not changed in that there was a common ethos with other schools across the same Local Authority with the aim of pupils 'making progress, and every teacher delivering good lessons' (Lead Practitioner, School-2). A priority for the school's vision was 'all students making at least good progress' (School-2's website). It was believed that the ethos of the school and vision for staff and pupils would have been the same whether it had been an academy or not. Greater expectations of pupils were seen for them to achieve academically, and not just to be happy at school, but also to be aspirational in their targets and achievements. The school's ethos was that it was a setting in which it 'created a culture which promotes challenge, respect, dignity and self-worth' (School-2's website). It was perhaps indicative that it was the person who saw the most negative side to pupils who saw the most change in the way the staff approached and encouraged pupils and the ethos around school as she considered that 'the ethos is changing daily' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-2). It would appear that she had a more negative view of the school's ethos prior to academisation because of the nature of her role. Alternatively, she saw a real impact of the efforts of all involved not only to reinforce the ethos which was already there but to make it more obvious to staff and pupils. The ethos emphasised the importance of a collective impact and effort using the motto 'together everyone achieves more (TEAM)' (School-2's website).

School-3 was similar to School-2 in that the ethos and vision for the school had always existed and according to the Executive Head Teacher, in terms of the principles, there was no change as the ethos underpins the school's core values which had always existed. However, the way in which it was delivered and communicated to staff and pupils was through 'clarity, clear vision, clear principles' (Vice Principal, School-3). It was felt that the vision existed and all staff were following it, but it was how the individual translated that into their everyday teaching and approach to pupils. All staff had to 'have the courage of our convictions and to take risks in the right cause' to have a positive impact upon the teaching and learning for the benefit of the pupils (School-3's website). Therefore, no real change was seen in the values upon which the vision was based but instead it was how it was conveyed to pupils which changed. The

belief about the vision was even taken to an extreme in that it was thought that 'there's a bit of a show about what we are trying to provide but I think it's more about ticking boxes' (Teacher in Charge of Behaviour, School-3). This showed a change in perception of the vision in that it was not about the pupils but instead about ensuring that the school was seen to be doing the right thing. This reiterated the point that the vision itself did not change; what changed was how it was portrayed. On the other hand a big change in the ethos of the school was seen in the pupils' demeanour and how it changed positively. There were more opportunities for pupils outside of the classroom and there was more communication with parents and feeder primary schools following academisation with all cohorts performing well as a result of pupils being the focus and expectations being high (School-3). The vision changed in that staff had to be able to convince pupils that the journey to success was possible for each of them regardless of their starting point or background and that they should have the 'determination to overcome obstacles and reach success' (School-3's website). However, according to Hoskins (2015) the introduction of academies is unlikely to improve perceptions and outcomes as pupils are unable to overcome family background. External factors and family influences will always be stronger than an academy institution as a driving force behind pupils (Ovenden-Hope, 2015).

School-4 was a high performing school and there was a unanimous view that the ethos did not change following academisation. The school already had a strong ethos which was driven by pupil success and focused on pupil outcomes. The environment was such that all members of staff 'work to provide opportunities for all to achieve the highest possible standards and success in academic matters, in sport and in music and the arts' (School-4's website). The only change which was seen was that, like the other schools, academisation 'has reinforced what we held as our inner beliefs' (Head Teacher, School-4). This largely accords with the lived experiences of the other schools. Although the school was already in a strong position, the shift to being an academy gave it self-belief and freedom to extend its ethos without restrictions. Impact upon pupils was even more of a focus and driving force as the school was a place where:

students can prepare effectively and positively to face the future with confidence, and our aim is for a true partnership of students, staff, parents, governors and local people, placing our school at the very heart of the community (School-4's website).

Therefore, pupil outcomes and pupil development were given the upmost importance and if a decision was to be made which resulted in no impact for pupils then the ethos dictated that there was no reason to implement it.

The Consultant Principal who had experience of both converter and sponsored academies portrayed a slightly different view. He thought that the change of vision depended upon the stage at which the school was prior to its academisation. Converter academies tended to use their own vision and the freedom of being an academy to change ethos to help and support underperforming schools which they would not have been able to do prior to academisation. However, sponsored academies tended to be more progress driven given their underperformance. The focus on progress may well have been a shift or was the principle of their ethos prior to academisation, but was not well conveyed, and was thus ineffective. He thought that it was very school specific as opposed to being able to make a generalisation as it depended on how much change was needed in a school and whether there were external decision-makers (Consultant Principal). The Executive Director felt that there had been no change in schools' visions or ethos upon their academisation. Across the borough there was a mission to which all schools, whether maintained or academies, had signed up to. The very basic principle of the mission was to have 'better children' (Executive Director). Therefore, this principle was reflected in every school's ethos or vision for its pupils. The individual schools could have approached it in ways which were appropriate for the individual school but the principle remained the same.

#### **4.2.11 Summary**

The participants from each group who were interviewed produced a varied picture when considering the possible aims for the introduction of the Academies Act 2010 and the academisation of their individual schools. Freedom appeared to be perceived as the main aim of the Act in addition to the raising of attainment that is enjoyed once academisation has taken place. Freedom, allowing stakeholders to adapt their practice to achieve the aim of improved pupil attainment, was considered to be an aim. Financial advantage was not seen by all of these participants as a motive for the introduction of the Academies Act 2010. A participant's experience of the academisation process coloured their perception of the aim of the Academies Act 2010.

The most interesting response was from the Executive Head Teacher of Schools 2 and 3; one being a converter and other being a sponsored academy. He was the only participant who was able to name the policy which governed academies and he was the only participant who listed attainment, financial gain and autonomy as being the aims of the Academies Act 2010. Therefore, we can infer that because he was clearly more informed about the existence of the Act and was also the most knowledgeable about its content, he gave a more complex and comprehensive response which was based not only upon his individual experience but also his wider knowledge and analytical skills.

It is evident from the analysis of the data that there are a number of professionals working in academies, or are connected to academies, who make daily decisions within the Academies Act framework and yet do not know of its existence, will not have read the policy, let alone spent any time studying it thoroughly, and show no knowledge of its content. Therefore, this begs the question as to whether academies are fully benefiting from being academies if those working in them do not appreciate the Act's aims and how they can be best used to maximise the school's potential and impact on pupils' development and success.

It would appear that, for the most part, Schools 1 and 4 were not dissimilar in their perceptions and lived experiences of how academisation had affected different elements of school life. These were both converter academies and therefore it can be expected that the two were similar in many ways. However, School-2 was also a converter academy yet it was underperforming, so it had similar perceptions and lived experiences to that of School-3. There was clearly a continuity of thought and beliefs between Schools 2 and 3. This may have been partly because they were both underperforming and partly because they had the same Executive Head Teacher. It would appear that the perceptions of stakeholders whether they were from a converter or sponsored academy did have similarities perhaps where it would not have been expected. It did depend on the level of seniority of the participant as to whether the response accorded with that of the Head Teacher and other senior leaders. The response of the participants holding a less senior position was not always the same as that of the decision-makers which implies that the effect of the Academies Act is seen differently depending upon who is on the receiving end of it.

The biggest impact was seen by participants in the pupil attainment, finances and opportunities for CPD and pupil and staff support. Not all participants saw a direct positive financial impact yet the perceptions of those who did not see a direct positive saw other positive benefits which would only have been possible with access to more finances or a reorganisation and reprioritisation of finances. Therefore, an inference may be drawn that there was a positive financial impact but one that was not necessarily witnessed by individual stakeholders in terms of them having more disposable income and was seen only in terms of benefits to other areas of the school both for staff and pupils.

It is difficult to compare these schools in terms of behaviour as Schools 1 and 4 historically had well-behaved pupils and Schools 2 and 3 did not due to their respective catchment areas. However, the reference to behaviour was more subtle in relation to School-1 in so far as it was not simply a case of good or bad conduct but behaviour that enhanced their learning.

Expectations were perhaps higher and taken to a different level when looking at the behaviour of a school that already had good behaviour. Behaviour needed to be behaviour that was going to enhance pupils' learning, as opposed to behaviour per se that was either positive or negative in any setting. This type of differentiation would be difficult to see in schools such as Schools 2 and 3 where there was a greater struggle with general behaviour and until that was under control the challenge to look at behaviour to enhance learning may have been too great.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### 5.1 Reflection

When starting the journey of this study I aimed to explore the various views of those involved with academies at different levels. This was in relation to the participants' perceptions regarding the aim of the Academies Act and their personal lived experiences within an academy school. I undertook interviews with various participants holding different positions in order to establish particular patterns produced across their responses. These responses then led to the identification of themes which were categorised to highlight the similarities and differences in the perceptions of stakeholders.

In order for research to have a purpose and make a contribution to existing knowledge, it is imperative to understand the researcher's positionality (Abbott, 1994). While I appreciate that, the mere inclusion of my positionality does not mean that the research can be taken for granted and that it is problem free (Spivak, 1988), I believe that the reader has information about my background (such as education and employment details) available to him or her to appreciate how my positionality impinged on the conduct of the research.

I have included my positionality in order to demonstrate to the reader the reasoning for my choice of topic and method of research. The reflexivity process for a researcher and the reasoning for the researcher's approach is dependent upon a researcher's positionality and how the events during the research affect the researcher and the participants and whether the ever-evolving research material is permitted to be developed. The inclusion of positionality and reflexivity ensures that a robust piece of research is carried out with an awareness of subjectivity. I have provided my positionality in relation to my professional and social background: privately educated, only child, white, British, Christian, Conservative, no exposure to state schools before training to be a teacher, qualified solicitor and a qualified teacher.

I worked in a school which was undergoing academisation and worked closely with colleagues in schools which had already academised. Through conversations with colleagues it quickly became apparent to me that despite staff in school being subject to the change of working in a school which was to become an academy, none of the staff, including senior leaders, understood the meaning of academisation, its reason and its effects on pupils and staff. I found that colleagues who were part of senior leadership making important decisions relating to academisation, had no knowledge, training or guidance as to the framework within which they were working. Following informal conversations with colleagues at other schools it became apparent that this situation was not unique to the school in which I worked. This pointed to a gap in the knowledge among practitioners which prompted me to question whether there was also a gap in literature regarding what it means for the individual stakeholders to work in a school which academises.

Upon hearing that the school in which I worked was going to become an academy, I began to research the Academies Act using my analytical and organisational strengths as a solicitor to appreciate what it meant for me, the school, the staff and pupils. I advocate making enquiries of others when there are areas about which I have no expertise. As a result of an informal conversation, I discovered that there were many people working within academies who knew very little and, in most cases, nothing about them. Therefore, it was logical to undertake in-depth research as a way to examine the experiences of staff in academies. In addition to this I used my legal skills (expertise in the law and Acts of Parliament) and analytical skills to consider policies and the Academies Act itself. It became quickly evident to me that the change regarding academies was being introduced very quickly and therefore, at the time I

started the research there was very little literature available upon which I was able to draw and which indeed practitioners were able to use. Therefore, I felt that my research would make a unique and original contribution to knowledge given that it was the advent of the change and practitioners working in academies themselves did not know what was going to happen, let alone researchers having sufficient time to research the area and produce findings to inform policy and practice.

Although research can be unique, in particular when selecting small samples and using qualitative methods, it can also be transferable to other settings with the use of contextual information and appreciation (Shenton, 2004). It is evident from the chosen research questions that those who were asked to take part in the research were asked for their interpretation and view of issues in relation to the research topic. However, the findings could be applicable to other academy settings in other areas of the country. This leads to the discussion with regard to an individual's perceptions of the same thing and as to how research can be value-free creating a credible and valid piece of research. According to Denscombe an individual's stance emanates from individual senses and perceptions which allow us to see the same thing from different viewpoints. However, at the same time the researcher's stance must not taint the research (Denscombe, 2010). This questions whether or not research can be value-free which has been discussed earlier, and I reached the conclusion that no research is value-free. However, the researcher can always take steps to eliminate bias and promote transparency in order to produce more credible research.

Educational policy is developed from a number of underlying elements which lie at the centre of society and it reacts to and takes into consideration many aspects of everyday life such as social standing, emotional impulses, financial influences and constraints together with politics both at national and international level (Morris, 2012). As far as the Academies Act is concerned there are a number of influences which can be drawn upon in order to establish the potential reasons for its implementation. It is not as simple as pinpointing one event or cause which led directly to the creation of the Academies Act. Upon reading of the Academies Act 2010, the points which the policy makers have intended to address are clear and it is no surprise that there is emphasis upon important elements of society (Lumby and Muijs, 2014). However, other driving forces which may not be so explicit are in existence and enhance the contents of the Act. It is essential to read a policy in the light of its setting culturally, politically and historically.

Policy evolves over a period of time and is not simply the passing of a law. Policy can be instigated by a simple statement made by a policy maker, such as a politician, which is then reported and is in the public domain. This may then be finalised with the passing of a law or the creation of a document. However, in general terms (when not considering the passing of a law) a policy can be verbal or a habitual event which shapes and influences change within society (Torjman, 2005). It is therefore essential when analysing policy that a researcher appreciates the social and political situation surrounding the creation of the policy.

Upon reading the Academies Act 2010, I noted that various aspects of education are included in it such as management, curriculum and staffing. There are a number of stakeholders who are affected by the passing of the Act although possibly in different ways; yet all stakeholders are equally important. There are too many aspects and stakeholders who are affected by the introduction of the Academies Act 2010 to go into detail about all of them. Therefore, I concentrated upon the main drivers, such as finance, attainment and autonomy. These elements are prevalent within the 2010 White Paper (DFE, 2010). In addition, the idea of neoliberalism purported by Ball (2012) stands out in the programme of academies. The drivers link directly to the research question regarding the stakeholders' perceptions of the aim of the policy and the lived experiences of stakeholders.

The reports commissioned by various bodies focused upon pupil attainment and the impact of academisation on results (National Audit Office, 2010). The connection between value for

money and the outcome in terms of improved pupil attainment is also mentioned (Public Accounts Committee, 2007). However, there is no emphasis upon the importance of the understanding of the policy by those who are governed by it and no in-depth analysis of the effect of the policy upon stakeholders and their perceptions of its impact. This shows a distinct lack of understanding on the part of policy makers. It is essential to ensure that those who are being affected by a policy provide feedback to shape, develop and improve future policies. Without the stakeholders' input there is little opportunity to improve and change policies which take into account those who are working with and under them. These are the people who are best informed to contribute positively to the improvement of existing policy in order to ensure that future policies do not suffer similar pitfalls to those in the past.

## **5.2 The aims of the Academies Act – Literature and Participants' Views**

Freedom for schools in terms of curriculum content, organisation and delivery are considered by stakeholders to be a key aim of the Academies Act (Queen's Speech, 2010, Stewart, 2013). In addition to this, there is the aim to give pupils an opportunity to receive a better education, to enable them to achieve more and to be able to compete at an international level with young people all over the world (BBC News, 2010a, Gunter and McGinity, 2014). Prior to the introduction of academies and on the basis of the education system which then stood, pupils did not have an equal chance to be able to gain employment or obtain places at further education institutions (Gorard, 2009). These are two priorities listed publicly as being the aim for the Academies Act 2010. However, it is interesting that the participants are generally of a similar view regarding the aims. It could be argued that these views echoed what had been in the media and the participants therefore merely repeated propaganda. Alternatively, I would suggest that the responses given were as a result of the participants' own lived experiences.

The participants from each group who were interviewed produced a varied picture when considering the possible aims for the introduction of the Academies Act 2010 and the academisation of their individual schools. Freedom appeared to be perceived as the main aim of the Act in addition to the raising of attainment which is enjoyed once academisation has taken place. Freedom, allowing stakeholders to adapt their practice to achieve the aim of improved pupil attainment, was considered to be an aim. Financial advantage was not seen by all of these participants as a motive for the introduction of the Academies Act 2010. A participant's experience of the academisation process coloured their perception of the aim of the Academies Act 2010.

It is evident from the data that there are a lot of professionals working in academies, or in connection with academies, who make daily decisions within the Academies Act framework and yet do not know of its existence, will not have read the policy, let alone spent any time studying it thoroughly, and show no knowledge of its content. Therefore, this questions whether academies are fully benefitting from being academies if those working in them do not appreciate the Act's aims and how they can be best used to maximise the school's potential and impact on pupils' development and successes.

There was no one single response which related to each of the participants. Each participant was able to impart their own version of how he or she believed the Academies Act had originated and the reason for its implementation based upon his or her own experience and school. Many participants were in agreement with the view held in the Queen's speech and that of the BBC News in that freedom and improved attainment were at the top of the list as being the aims of the Academies Act. These two elements of education seem to work together in that when a school and its staff have less restrictions they are also able to become more creative and innovative in their teaching content and methods (Machin and Vernoit, 2010). Along with creativity, the enthusiasm for learning both on the part of staff and pupils is important too, as it stimulates an environment of learning thus improving the attainment of pupils. Improved pupil attainment was considered to be a key player in the aim for the Academies Act. This is perhaps because traditionally schools are outcome and attainment

driven as this is how they are measured whether the school is poor or outstanding in its performance (Gorard, 2009). Financial gain was not considered to be a priority and this is because there is too much variation across academies in the management of funds (Wolfe, 2011). The positive or negative viewpoints of the participants were very much dependent upon his or her school and its success in terms of attainment, leadership, finances and staff support as a result of undergoing the academisation process.

There was only one participant, Executive Head Teacher of Schools 2 and 3, who was knowledgeable about the academisation process. He was the only participant who was able to name the policy which governed academies being the framework within which he worked. He was also the only participant who listed attainment, financial gain and autonomy as being the aims of the Academies Act 2010. Consequently, he was able to give a more informed and coherent viewpoint on the aim of the Academies Act. Therefore, it may be possible to draw an inference that because he was clearly more informed about the existence of the Act and was also the most knowledgeable about its content, he was able to give a broader response as to what he considered the aim of the Act to be. Perhaps he gave a more complex and comprehensive response as to the aim as he was not just answering based upon his individual experience but his wider knowledge and analytical skills to answer the question. It perhaps follows that when you are in a position of such responsibility you would be expected to have an overall vision of the impact of academisation and its effect upon your school. For this reason he believed that financial gain, improved pupil attainment and freedom were all aims of the Academies Act 2010. However, it does not necessarily mean that a position of such responsibility carries a more in-depth understanding because the leaders of the other schools were unable to articulate the policy or to even give a rounded perception of the overall aims of the Academies Act. I suggest that it is very much dependent upon the individual as to how much they understand about academisation and that is due to his or her desire to seek as opposed to being provided, the information. The government should have ensured those expected to practise the policy receive appropriate resources and attend training sessions with opportunities to ask questions.

Arguably, from my findings, as the other participants did not even know about the existence of the policy underpinning academies, it is perhaps a fair assumption that as part of their job they had not been provided with any training regarding the policy, its content, its aims or purpose. It could be said that the participants themselves could have researched the policy as it would impact upon their career. However, the onus is upon the schools to provide staff with essential training regarding the job. Therefore, I purport that a clear understanding of what the policy is and how it may impact upon a person's everyday job is essential and should be provided to schools and their staff. It would be beneficial for staff to have an outline of the salient points regarding the Academies Act and how that should be cascaded into their daily practice. An example of this would be a practical demonstration to staff regarding funding for the school, funding for each department and a record of accountability for the department or member staff as to how the funding is to be used to directly demonstrate a link to improving performance. A comparison with the situation prior to their academy status may help to focus staff upon the flexibility they now have in decision-making not only regarding funding but also in terms of curriculum choice. The failure to provide staff in schools with basic training regarding the Academies Act is analogous to not providing fire fighters with training in respect of health and safety. The participants can be criticised to a certain extent for their lack of knowledge upon the policy. However, schools, as large organisations, which have a duty to their staff, stand to be criticised and to be criticised upon the lack of essential training which has not been provided.

Schools need to support academy staff to enhance collaboration in order to ensure staff work effectively (Chapman, 2013). If this is not happening then schools are clearly not maximising the potential in their staff. If staff are unaware of the common aim of not only the individual



school but also the framework within which they are working, then there is the likelihood that the school and staff will be less effective and successful than they could otherwise have been. I argue that if schools invest more time in training staff upon the purpose of academisation then schools would perhaps gain more benefit from being an academy and would, consequently see more positive outcomes.

### **5.3 Conclusion of the findings relating to the overall lived experiences of stakeholders**

The changes in practice or environments presented here were considered in the light of the continuation and outcome of the change (Fullan, 2007). In accordance with Ball, education appears to be transforming (2007b). I believe that stakeholders' reactions to the introduction of academies and how it has affected them as individuals is prevalent. Lived experiences of participants were not dissimilar to the aims which were expressed by participants as to what they believed were the aims of the Academies Act. However, there were some additional elements which were included by many of the participants as impacts that they had seen within their individual schools. For the most part, Schools 1 and 4 were not dissimilar in their perceptions of how academisation had affected different elements of school life. These were both very successful schools prior to academisation and therefore were in a strong position in terms of attainment and Ofsted inspections prior to becoming academies (Ofsted, 2015a and b). Out of the other two schools one was a converter and the other a sponsored academy. School-2 was a converter academy yet it had similar perceptions to that of School-3 because of its position in terms of attainment and Ofsted rating as it was considered to be underperforming as was the sponsored academy. There was clearly a continuity of thought and beliefs between Schools-2 and 3. This may have been partly because they were both underperforming and partly because they had the same Executive Head Teacher. Therefore, the experiences of the participants were similar in that they had the same obstacles, restrictions and similar pupils with whom they needed to work in order to make the schools' outcomes a success. In addition, the Executive Head Teacher was the same for both schools even though one school was sponsored and the other a converter academy. Therefore, I argue that the presence and influence of the sponsor and the presence of the same individual across the two schools would have had a bearing upon the experiences of the stakeholders.

The most frequent responses regarding the impact of academisation were seen in relation to pupil attainment, finances and opportunities for CPD and pupil and staff support. The participants did not all see a direct positive financial impact yet their perceptions of other positive benefits would only have been possible with access to more finances or a reorganisation and reprioritisation of finances. Schools which undergo academisation become an individual business run with such economic drive and direction (Wolfe, 2011). Therefore, an inference may be drawn that there was a positive financial impact but one that was not necessarily witnessed by individual stakeholders in terms of them having more disposable income but was seen in terms of benefits to other areas of the school both for staff and pupils. Behaviour was not an element of school life which was perceived by participants as being positively impacted upon as a result of academisation. Schools 1 and 4 historically had well-behaved pupils and Schools 2 and 3 did not due to their respective catchment areas. The traditional view of behaviour relates to whether or not pupils are being naughty. The reference to behaviour was more subtle in relation to the expectations in School-1 which were higher and taken to a different level when looking at the behaviour of a school which already had good behaviour and for this reason the corporate logo was introduced. It was not simply a case of good or bad conduct but behaviour that enhanced their learning and got 'kids activated and up out of their seats and doing things for themselves' (Associate Assistant Principal, School-1). It was not a case of pupils behaving badly but instead staff complacency and pupils not doing enough to maximise their learning potential. Behaviour needed to be behaviour that was going to positively assist in pupils' learning, behaviour for learning, as opposed to behaviour that was either positive or negative in any setting. This type of differentiation would

be difficult to see in schools such as Schools-2 and 3 where there was a greater struggle with general behaviour and until that was under control the challenge to look at behaviour for learning may have been too great.

Overall the perceptions of the stakeholders were mixed. The position of the participant within the academy affected responses. There was a marked difference between the response of stakeholders who were not decision makers and those who were; which questions the level of understanding of the policy by individuals at different levels and implies that the effect of the Academies Act is seen differently depending upon who is on the receiving end of it. The views were very much dependent on whether the school had converted or was sponsored and its position prior to its academisation. All schools saw an impact in some shape or form on at least one element following academisation. There were very few negative impacts of academisation which were not counteracted with a positive. It appears that the perceptions of these participants were positive in that they experienced a positive change or no change was present but there was an absence of a negative change. However, 'there is still no incontrovertible evidence that academies lead to better outcomes for the children' (Consultant Principal). Gorard (2011) argues that upon the opening of the first set of academies, the reported success of these was perhaps obscured. The short-term successes were shown to be false and thus the academy advocates reverted to a 'wait and see' position following a cohort passing through the entire cycle of academisation. The premise of an academy was to improve standards in failing schools. However, results in certain academies do not illustrate such expectations, showing pupils make little progress over time and yet there is a low number of FSM pupils or an academy performing worse than the school which it replaced and with a lower number of FSM pupils. Therefore, the envisaged profile of these academies is not being fulfilled (Gorard, 2011).

Freedom for schools to shape their curriculum, financial distribution and staffing was prevalent in all participant academies. However, with the freedom came consequences. All schools were measured (and for the foreseeable future will be measured) and compared with others. Academies are still rated and compared by state enforced measures despite their independent private governance (Hatcher, 2011). Therefore, if academies choose to use the freedom unwisely then they will suffer the consequences in terms of their rating by Ofsted, pupil results and financial viability.

The starting position of a school and the reason for academisation very much determined the perceptions of individual stakeholders and their reaction to the policy (Bell and Stevenson, 2006). Therefore, it would be almost impossible to determine whether academisation had been the sole cause of the positive impact upon the various areas drawn out in this research. It would be misleading to say that struggling academies are performing any worse or better than equivalent schools with the same intake (Gunter and McGinity, 2014). As academy schools are not producing better results in comparison to maintained schools, it puts into question the efficacy and reasoning for academisation given the amount of effort, money and time spent in going through the process if a better outcome for pupils is not guaranteed (Gleeson, 2011).

Whether academies are successful depends upon what the considered objective of their introduction was: improving attainment in under-privileged areas or changing the positioning of schools from the maintained sector to the private enterprise with a change in accountability, governance and funding. There is no definitive evidence that academisation of a school leads to enhanced results. However, there is more competition in terms of procurement of services and freedom to use funds than in a maintained school (Gleeson, 2011). The expressions of success of academies have been based upon misleading information and data using varying results to compare schools. There is insufficient concrete evidence to establish a link between improvement in attainment and academies in order to justify their existence. Changing the

status of schools is interfering with the education of children who only have one attempt at achieving. The time, money and effort which has been pumped into academies could have perhaps been used to enhance already existing schools and achieve the same if not a better outcome (Gorard, 2011). It is evident that all schools saw an impact in some form but whether the impact was entirely due to academisation or whether it was partly attributable to academisation with other external influences is very difficult to determine. There is insufficient research in this area of education to say definitely that schools which have academised have seen a positive impact entirely as a result of academisation. It is fair to say that prior to this research there existed only statistical data analysis concerning academies and now there is some interpretative data which shows a positive impact making an original contribution to knowledge in this area. However, there still needs to be more research in this area focusing upon triangulation of existing data and further exploration of avenues in order to further be able to suggest with confidence whether academisation improves education.

## **5.4 Implications of research**

The findings of this research have implications for academy schools in other settings. However, an individual's perception may differ depending upon the setting which introduces the notion of whether research can be value-free. I have emphasised the importance of positionality throughout the thesis to demonstrate the reasoning for decisions taken regarding the research design of the study. The research methods used in this research lend themselves to the creation of generalisations within a particular setting (Cohen et al., 2011). Generalisations occur as a result of a single observation and following that observation inferences may be drawn which in turn produce formulisations which can be extended to situations in the future (Mayring, 2007). I would concede that the findings from this research may not be applicable to all academy schools in all settings although I believe that there is much merit within the findings that should be carefully considered and valued. Conversely it could be that some of the findings are applicable to other settings and they should therefore be considered upon their own merits. It is essential that readers are fully aware of the details and setting of the research project in order that they may appreciate any generalisations and establish whether these generalisations are applicable to their setting and context (Stake, 1980). This is referred to by Myers as 'naturalistic' generalisation (Myers, 2000). The reader cannot value the research without the knowledge and understanding of its context to then be able to consider whether or not it is a generalisation which may apply to his or her own context.

The research shows that there is a varied impact upon schools following the academisation process. Fullan argues that outcomes of change are unpredictable and thus variable upon each recipient and each organisation which is affected (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2017). It is also debatable as to whether the changes following academisation, which have been experienced, are as a direct result of academisation or whether there are other external influences. The government and policy makers may need to reassess the system and policy as to its efficacy if early indications are to be believed in that lived experiences are very mixed, and there is no direct link between Ofsted ratings, attainment and lived experiences. If the same support is available to converter academies as that for sponsored academies, it would be reasonable to presume that the extra support for converter academies, already successful schools, will ensure the gap between sponsored and converter academies is maintained if not increased.

A great deal of money has been spent by schools, sponsors and government bodies upon the decision-making process of academisation, the practicalities and the sponsorship. There would be a dramatic financial impact upon all stakeholders if academies did not continue to develop or did not continue at all. I would argue that, to a certain extent, there is clear evidence of insufficient data to demonstrate the positive impact of academies. There is little negative data but the absence of a negative does not necessarily produce a positive. Therefore,

finance is perhaps the reason why academies continue to be in existence because the cost of either reverting to a pre-academies education system or creating and installing a new education system and framework would be prohibitive. There is often a dilemma presented and a conflict arising between decisions which are taken for purely financial purposes and decisions which benefit the pupils. I question which route policymakers are taking: the purely financial or the best interests of pupils (Ball, 2015), and would argue that the financial incentive is not the best reason to maintain a system. Finances are always a consideration although the education system has the best quality education at the forefront of its priorities. It is important that schools do not continue as academies or become academies simply because that is what is expected by the government and the media. If being an academy is not going to enhance the learning environment and quality of learning for pupils, then what is the purpose of the change? The implications of this research are directed at all stakeholders involved with academies: pupils (receiving education and whether they have seen an improvement), parents selecting schools for their children (will children receive a different education by attending an academy), teachers applying for jobs (their pay and conditions potentially differing from Local Authority maintained schools), school leaders (balancing education and finances) and government (is there sufficient evidence showing positive impact of academisation to justify the continuance of academies).

This research has been undertaken at a time when academies have been in existence for a number of years and there has been a steady increase in the number of converter and sponsored academies. However, not all schools have academised and a number of schools are adamant that they will not academise. Many are undecided whether to academise due to the lack of evidence available to prove whether academisation is likely to be beneficial. There is insufficient evidence to suggest whether academies are any more efficient than state maintained schools (Walford, 2014).

Previous reports commissioned (such as the House of Commons Education Committee (2015)) addressed pupil attainment as quantitative data which is unconnected to individuals and their experiences. Therefore, I have taken research on academies a step further and have conducted in-depth qualitative research on the lived experiences of those who had gone through academisation to make a new and original contribution to knowledge in this field.

The claim that the academies' programme has met its targets and produces education in a way that is value for money is a strong declaration (National Audit Office, 2010). I argue that there has in the past been insufficient research to support this claim and therefore there has been a large gap in current research. I have attempted to start to fill the gap by introducing a different dimension to the research currently available. It is apparent that the research in relation to academies is policy-based research as the policy is already in existence. A dramatic development for future wider policy making in education in the UK would be policies developed on the basis of research, that is evidence-based policies. I therefore hope that my research is a small step in this direction.

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken in 2013. The situation regarding academies in 2016/2017 has evolved over time with the change in political parties in power. The strength of my study is that it has captured something which could otherwise have been lost because the change to the school system happened so quickly. Research going forward will probably be reporting upon the current form of academies as opposed to the period of their inception. The provisions of the White Paper provide for the extension of the academies' programme with all schools being academies by 2022. Along with this will be the introduction of new performance tables for MATs (DFE, 2016a). However, Riddell (2016a) argues that this notion dates back at least to the 2006 White Paper (House of Commons Education Committee, 2006). These performance tables can paint a variety of pictures depending upon how the data is presented. When all schools academise, as is the government's proposal, it will no longer be possible to compare local authority schools to academies. This will reduce the opportunity to present the

data in such a way which shows that a school driven education system works because once all schools have academised they should be on a level playing field and have comparable data (ATL, 2016). However, based on the current general performance of academies, depending upon which version of data is analysed, the government may not feel positive about the outcome given that not all academies have been seen to be a success. Therefore, it is evident that there could be more academies which are unsuccessful and, given the large number of schools which may academise across the country, there could be a significantly high number of unsuccessful academies. I suggest that this drastic change in the education system could be the start of the collapse of the education system because if high performing schools do not have sufficient capacity or funding to support the influx of academies, then standards in the already existing high-quality academies could very possibly drop. A blanket approach is not always the most practical solution to issues and therefore perhaps academisation is not the most appropriate step for all schools in the country. Schools have had a period of seven years to consider becoming an academy up to the time of this research. Therefore, all of those schools which have chosen to remain a Local Authority school must have reached a conclusion as to why academisation was not a suitable option for them. However, it would now appear that the government is ignoring these schools which have previously made informed decisions and forcing academisation upon them (Dickens, 2016). Alternatively, following previous changes in education, the development of academisation and reduced local authority funding, Riddell (2016a) suggests that the new academy based school system may be more reliable than the current local authority system.

Under the White Paper, if most schools either join a MAT or become one then surely this is the same as being part of a local authority. I would argue that the government is trying to reinvent the wheel whereby the MAT takes over the role of the local authority. I question as to why the government's belief is that a MAT would be a better manager than the local authority system already in place in which there are many highly skilled professionals to assist in the improvement of schools (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2016).

The White Paper promotes school excellence in every aspect in following policies which have not especially achieved the aim (ATL, 2016). Therefore, the government, by the introduction of this policy, will effectively be continuing to do more of the same which currently does not work (ATL, 2016). According to Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector of Schools in England, MATs which are worst performing perform no better than the worst performing Local Authority maintained schools (ATL, 2016). Therefore, I question what the motive would be for changing from being a school under the local authority to being a school part of a MAT. It would be reasonable to suggest that if MATs do not play a better role than Local Authorities why would it be necessary to become part of one?

The implementation of the expansion of academies in accordance with the White Paper will potentially be a financial and administrative nightmare. Supporters of the previous government policy regarding academies do not appear to be in support of this policy extension which forces all schools to become academies by 2022. It is not always possible to fully implement previous policies, that is to say that, insufficient capacity in schools is preventing staff from effectively supporting other schools due to teacher shortages and ultimately funding shortages (Mansell, 2016b). There are academies which have been heavily criticised by Ofsted upon inspection. Therefore, it is difficult to see how academisation would benefit a pupil who is already attending a successful school. There is a danger that a successful school which is forced, under the new policy, to become an academy may have leaders being distracted by a restructure and administrative reformation thus taking their eye off the quality of education within the school. Therefore, this could result in a successful school deteriorating (Mansell, 2016b).

I suggest a period of reflection in order to analyse the findings and recommendations of my research before developing and extending the programme of academies. The perceptions of

stakeholders need to be considered as opposed to focusing upon numerical data. It is possible to present figures in a way which positively supports a viewpoint. However, it is interesting to note that the perception of stakeholders in this research does not demonstrate the belief of a direct correlation between academisation and school improvement which accords with Eyles et al. (2017). Therefore, before the programme is developed, further consideration should be given to stakeholders' viewpoints in advance of creating an even bigger upheaval, both administratively and financially, to the education system.

## **5.5 Significance of the Study**

The importance of this research study is that it fills a gap in the literature and captures the birth of academies as they were at their inception. Without this research there is a possibility that the reporting of the original academies may be lost and only academies as they have developed into their current state will be researched. The gap which this study has filled is that the available data and research upon academies is insufficient and limited because academies have not been in existence for as long as Local Authority maintained schools. This study attempts to capture the reason for the existence of academies in the original form and how stakeholders have received such a policy. There is little evidence to establish whether academies are achieving their goal and create a positive impact upon pupil attainment which enable pupils to be able to compete in an international arena.

The targeted audience of this research is any individual or organisation who is connected to or intends to be connected to academies. It is intended that schools considering academisation read the findings of this research and reassess whether academy status will give the school the change it needs or desires. Alternatively, it may allow schools to consider whether to adopt academisation to make the necessary changes or whether they can be achieved by means of an alternative method. Schools which have already academised may find this research useful to take stock of their achievements and shortcomings by categorising the experiences of others involved with academies and then to analyse how they can develop. It is also important for academies, which may not have experienced the change which they anticipated following academisation, to appreciate that there are other academies where the change has not been immediate or has not even been directly linked to academisation.

The differentiation between sponsored and converter academies has not been a focus of this research and this is perhaps an area for further study. This research is based upon qualitative data and there is scope for further analysis using quantitative data to undertake a mixed methods study. I would stress that qualitative research enables policy makers to gain a full understanding of the impact of a national policy at local level and thus implement necessary change, while quantitative research does not enable the researcher to ask 'why, how and when' in order to delve further into the true impact of a policy.

I have presented the research in such a way that it should be accessible to policy makers at all levels. It is perhaps easy to analyse statistics and massage figures to produce a desired policy outcome. However, it is not as easy to use lived experiences in the same way. Policy makers need to appreciate that when a policy is created it does not necessarily translate to others in the same way as originally intended. Policy makers should consider whether the Academies Act as a policy has been successful or whether reports are simply manipulating figures to ensure that it has been successful. The purpose behind creating such a policy as this was to enhance pupil attainment and therefore if this has not happened, or if it has but in the process it has had negative effects upon other areas of the education system, then policy makers need to be aware sooner rather than later. If they are not aware, then at a later stage further reform could be required and such reform could have been avoided or minimised if the issues are dealt with at an early stage before they spiral out of control.

There are a number of groups and establishments which support academies and there are those who are anti-academies. It would appear that often people are part of a particular group by default perhaps because of their work or involvement with academies. Therefore, it is essential for those people to understand the evidence presented by this research. This would enable them to have an informed view upon academies as opposed to simply being part of a viewpoint but at the same time not knowing or understanding why they hold that position.

This research contributes to the professional daily practice of all stakeholders who are connected to maintained and academy schools regardless of their role. For those who work with or within academies, it is essential that they are aware of the policy which governs the domain within which they work. This will enable them to make informed decisions about certain elements of practice and appreciate the reasoning behind the systems in place thus maximising their potential. Additionally, for those in maintained schools embarking upon the journey of academisation, an understanding of the various areas upon which the process of academisation may impact will assist them in their decision making process. This research clarifies the lived experiences of practitioners which may eliminate preconceived ideas of some stakeholders regarding the impact of academies whether they be positive or negative.

The implications for me on a personal level are that as I no longer work within schools, this research will not necessarily affect my career. However, I am a researcher and therefore there are areas of the topic of academies which have emerged from this study which need further investigation in order to contribute to the knowledge regarding this topic. In addition, I am in a position to advise academy schools upon various aspects of the management and running of the school in relation to legal issues. The lack of awareness of the content of the Act by stakeholders informs me as to the depth of information and detail that I need to convey to potential clients when advising them. The findings will enable me to present the research to schools who may be considering academisation and it may be used as a demonstration as to the preconceptions of stakeholders together with pitfalls before undertaking the process. Furthermore, I intend to disseminate my findings by way of writing and lecturing to ensure that other researchers are aware that the analysis of lived experiences contributes greatly to establishing whether there is a link between the drivers of a policy and how it is received and experienced by stakeholders.

## **5.6 Areas of Further Research**

There are many further avenues which could be explored resulting from my research. I have alluded to the elements of Fullan's change theory which have been relevant to the study. I have not emphasised this in great depth as this was not the focus. However, it would be interesting to consider the notion that the way in which a change is introduced determines how effective, meaningful and successful it may be (Fullan, 2006). This study considered in depth the impact upon the stakeholders but Fullan's theory could be used to consider the processes and how the introduction of the Academies Act should have been carried out using his stages of change in order to maximise its effectiveness and acceptance from all stakeholders.

There has been insufficient scope in the current research to make a true and definitive comparison between the lived experiences of converter and sponsored academy participants. Additionally, it would be appropriate to undertake a comparison between chain and non-chain academies to establish if perhaps academisation produces more successful outcomes and positive impacts when it is undertaken as part of a chain. The role of the Local Authority is intermittent and it would be useful to clarify its role simply by comparing Local Authorities across the country and considering their involvement in decisions and support in relation to academy schools within their authorities. The notion of freedom for academies is interesting, as this freedom is restricted because all academies are still subject to Ofsted inspection. This highlights the tension between the centralised decision of decentralising schools yet at the same time retaining a centralised power to inspect, measure and ultimately judge with the power to stipulate consequences for a decentralised organisation. Therefore, arguably, there

is no decentralisation of schools as government has retained, in an implicit manner, control by way of inspection and outcomes. The role played by Ofsted in its monitoring of academies should be established and consideration given as to whether academies and Local Authority maintained schools should be monitored and whether they should be monitored in the same way. This research has investigated the lived experiences of teachers and other professionals linked with academies. However, it would be interesting to establish how academies have impacted upon the lived experiences of pupils and any links established between the lived experiences of both groups of participants - pupils and teachers.

Ofsted plays an important part in education establishments whether the schools are Local Authority maintained or academies. A further area for research would be the experiences of Ofsted inspectors and their comparative experiences of different types of schools. Ofsted inspectors may also be in a position to express views as to how academies should be monitored and whether they should be monitored in the same way as Local Authority maintained schools. There are academies which are not part of an academy chain. However, do such academies receive sufficient support financially, strategically and pastorally for their staff? The financial impact upon academies has featured heavily in this study. A further pertinent area of research would be to investigate the government's efforts to ensure financial stability for its Local Authorities where many schools within the Local Authority have academised. This study has not concentrated upon the different perceptions of pupils leaving maintained schools as opposed to academy schools. Research could be undertaken to establish the perceptions of pupils attending academies and those attending maintained schools.

I accept that policy makers may put more emphasis on the positivist data as opposed to the interpretative approach to research in relation to academies. However, I would stress the importance of the qualitative data as it is the individuals within the system who create and become the information and figures which in turn become the quantitative data. I would suggest therefore that if policy makers can analyse and gain an understanding of the individuals behind the data and their lived experiences, they will then perhaps be able to shape future policies ultimately influencing data in the future. Quantitative data is faceless and behind all quantitative data are the faces of the individuals who have the potential to bring about future change for the benefit of children.



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## Appendix 1

### STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY FAST-TRACK ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM (STUDENTS) Faculty of Business Education & Law

Tick one box: ☐ TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE project   ☐ UNDERGRADUATE project  
☐ PhD/MPhil project   ☐ TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE MODULE assignment  
☐ TAUGHT UNDERGRADUATE MODULE assignment  
☐ Other project (Please state ... EdD... ..)

Title of Course on which enrolled ... .. Doctorate in Education... ..

Tick one box: Full-Time Study ☐ or Part-Time Study ☒

Title of project ... Raising standards through academisation? The Academies Act 2010 and schooling.  
 ....

Name of student researcher ... .. Louise Elizabeth Thornton ... ..

**Student Researchers- please note that certain professional organisations have ethical guidelines that you may need to consult when completing this form.**

**Supervisors/Module Tutors - please seek guidance from the Chair of your Faculty Ethics Committee if you are uncertain about any ethical issue arising from this application.**

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the main procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	X		
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	X		
3	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	X		
4	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			X
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	X		
6	With questionnaires and interviews will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	X		
7	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	X		
8	Will you give participants the opportunity to be debriefed i.e. to find out more about the study and its results?	X		

If you have ticked **No** to any of Q1-8 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form.

		YES	NO	N/A
9	Will your project deliberately mislead participants in any way?		X	

10	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?		X	
11	Is the nature of the research such that contentious or sensitive issues might be involved?		X	

If you have ticked **Yes** to 9, 10 or 11 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form. In relation to question 10 this should include details of what you will tell participants to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help). You may also need to consider risk assessment issues.

		YES	NO	N/A
12	Does your project involve work with animals?		X	
13	Do participants fall into any of the following special groups?  <b>Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory CRB clearance (or equivalent for overseas students)</b>	Children (under 18 years of age) People with communication or learning difficulties Patients People in custody People who could be regarded as vulnerable People engaged in illegal activities ( eg drug taking )	X	
14	Does the project involve external funding or external collaboration where the funding body or external collaborative partner requires the University to provide evidence that the project had been subject to ethical scrutiny?		X	

If you have ticked **Yes** to 12, 13 or 14 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form. There is an obligation on student and supervisor to bring to the attention of the Faculty Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

If you have ticked **Yes** to 13 and your participants are **patients** you must follow the Guidelines for Ethical Approval of NHS Projects.

## STUDENT

Provide in the boxes below (plus any other appended details) information required in support of your application. THEN SIGN THE FORM.

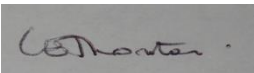
## RESEARCHER

Please

### Tick Boxes

I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications requiring a full ethics submission to the Faculty Ethics Committee.	X
<b>Give a brief description of participants and procedure (methods, tests used etc) in up to 150 words. I plan to use semi-structured interviews. I intend to approach 6 schools both primary and secondary to interview the head teachers and 3 teachers who have experience of at least 15 years. I would also like to interview a director of education in order to triangulate my findings.</b>	
I also confirm that: ii) All key documents e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire/interview are appended to this application.	X

Or ii) Any key documents e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire/interview schedules which need to be finalised following initial investigations will be submitted for approval by the project supervisor/module leader before they are used in primary data collection.	X
---	---

Signed...  ... Print Name... Louise Elizabeth Thornton... Date... 9.3.14 ...  
(Student Researcher)

**Please note that any variation to that contained within this document that in any way affects ethical issues of the stated research requires the appending of new ethical details. New ethical consent may need to be sought.**

The completed form (and any attachments) should be submitted for consideration by your Supervisor/Module Tutor

**SUPERVISOR/MODULE TUTOR  
PLEASE CONFIRM THE FOLLOWING:**

**Please**

**Tick Box**

I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications requiring a full ethics submission to the Faculty Ethics Committee	
i) I have checked and approved the key documents required for this proposal (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule)	
Or	
ii) I have checked and approved draft documents required for this proposal which provide a basis for the preliminary investigations which will inform the main research study. I have informed the student researcher that finalised and additional documents (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule) must be submitted for approval by me before they are used for primary data collection.	

## **SUPERVISOR AND SECOND ACADEMIC SIGNATORY**

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL (please delete as appropriate)**

**1) THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED USING AGREED UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES AND IS NOW APPROVED**

**2) THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE AS INVOLVING NO SIGNIFICANT ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, BUT FINAL APPROVAL FOR DATA COLLECTION IS SUBJECT TO THE SUBMISSION OF KEY DOCUMENTS FOR APPROVAL BY SUPERVISOR (see Appendix A)**

Signed... Print Name... Date...  
(Supervisor/Module Tutor)

Signed... Print Name... Date...  
(Second Academic Signatory)

**APPENDIX A  
AUTHORISATION FOR USE OF KEY DOCUMENTS**

**Completion of Appendix A is required when for good reasons key documents are not available when a fast track application is approved by the supervisor/module leader and second academic signatory.**

I have now checked and approved all the key documents associated with this proposal e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule

Signed... .. Print Name... .. Date... ..  
(Supervisor/Module Tutor)

## **Appendix 2**

### **An investigation of the implementation of the Academies Act 2010 policy and its perceived impact upon the raising of standards: Stakeholders' perceptions on policies and practices in UK academies**

#### **Research Questions:**

1. What are education stakeholders' perceptions of the aims of the Academies Act 2010?
  - a) What are the views of education stakeholders with regards to the role of academisation and raising standards?
  - b) What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding the aims of the Academies Act?
2. What are the lived experiences of stakeholders who have been in a school whilst it has gone through academisation?
  - a) What is the financial impact on the school?
  - b) What is the impact upon decision-making, vision and ethos?

#### **Semi-structured interview schedules**

The following questions will be asked during the interviews, with supplementary questions asked depending on the interviewees' response to earlier questions or for further elaboration.

#### **Interview Questions for Teachers and Consultant Principal**

##### ***Interview Questions to address Research Question 1***

1. What is your role within school?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. How long have you worked at this school?
4. Have you worked at any other school that was an academy?
5. Do you know which national policy governs academies?
6. Can you explain the history of the introduction of academies?
7. Why do you think academies were originally introduced?
8. Do you think the Academies Act is achieving its goals?
9. Would you recommend other teachers to work in an academy and if so, why? If not, why not?

##### ***Interview Questions to address Research Question 2***

1. Having seen a school go through academisation, have you seen any changes in the school?
2. In what ways has the leadership of the school altered, if at all?
3. In what ways has the ethos and vision of the school changed if at all?
4. Have you experienced a financial impact upon the school and if so in what way?
5. Have you seen curriculum changes? If yes, what kind?



6. Do you think there is a difference in the intake and exclusion rate since academisation?
7. Has there been a change in pupil behaviour since the academisation?
8. Have you noticed a change in the standards across the school? If yes, in what way?
9. Has academisation made a difference to pupil attainment?
10. What are your positive experiences of academisation?
11. What are your negative experiences of academisation?

### **Interview Question for Heads**

#### ***Interview Questions to address Research Question 1 - questions remain the same as for teachers and consultant principal***

1. What is your role within school?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. How long have you worked at this school?
4. Have you worked at any other school that was an academy?
5. Do you know which national policy governs academies?
6. Can you explain the history of the introduction of academies?
7. Why do you think academies were originally introduced?
8. Do you think the Academies Act is achieving its goals?
9. Would you recommend other teachers to work in an academy and if so, why? If not, why not?

#### ***Interview Questions to address Research Question 2***

1. What changes have you seen within the school following its academisation?
2. How has the leadership of the school changed?
3. Does the school have a different ethos and vision since academisation? Please elaborate
4. Do you have a different pupil intake now? Is pupil intake similar to what it was before the school became an academy? If not, how has it changed?
5. What has been the financial impact of academisation?
6. Has there been a change in pupil behaviour?
7. Has there been a change in exclusion rates since academisation?
8. Following academisation has there been a change in pupil attainment?
9. What are your positive experiences of academisation?
10. What are your negative experiences of academisation?
11. Would you recommend another school to academise and if so, why? If not, why not?

### **Interview Questions for the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families**

#### ***Interview Questions to address Research Question 1***

1. What is your role within education?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. Have you worked in a school? If so, in what capacity?
4. Do you know which national policy governs academies?
5. Can you explain the history of the introduction of academies?
6. Why do you think academies were originally introduced?
7. Do you think the Academies Act is achieving its goals?
8. Would you recommend schools to convert to academies?
9. How has the Academies Act been communicated to Directors?
10. Do you discuss the AA with the DfE

11. Has the commissioner been to the authority to talk about Academisation
12. How do council members feel about Academisation?
13. What direction do local councillors give to the director about academies?

***Interview Questions to address Research Question 2***

1. Having seen schools go through academisation, have you seen any changes in the schools?
2. In what ways has the leadership of schools altered, if at all?
3. In what ways has the ethos and vision of schools changed if at all?
4. Have you experienced a financial impact upon the schools and if so in what way?
5. Have you seen curriculum changes? If yes, what kind?
6. Do you think there is a difference in the intake and exclusion rate in these schools since academisation?
7. Has there been a change in pupil behaviour since the academisation?
8. Has there been a change in the standards across the schools? If yes, in what way?
9. Has academisation made a difference to pupil attainment?
10. What are your positive experiences of academisation?
11. What are your negative experiences of academisation?

## Appendix 3

Re: Raising standards through academisation? The Academies Act 2010 and schooling.

I am a part-time doctoral student at Staffordshire University undertaking research in Education. I am writing to request the participation of your school in my doctoral research project. This would involve an interview with you and three members of your teaching staff who have been in teaching for at least 15 years in order to gather data for my research. The interview would last for approximately 20-30 minutes and would focus on investigating each interviewee's perceptions about the national policy for academisation and how this is perceived by practitioners working in academies.

I have also enclosed a participant information sheet together with a participant consent form which contain details of the research.

I should be grateful if you would contact me by the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to say whether you are able to assist me and take part in the research, and return the signed consent form.

In the meantime, if you require further details then please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Louise Thornton  
BA (HONS) Modern Language Studies (University of Leicester)  
GDL Graduate Diploma in Law (De Montfort University)  
LPC Solicitors Qualification (Staffordshire University)  
PGCE (University of Sheffield)  
LLM Masters in Law (Staffordshire University)  
National College for Teaching and Leadership – National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership, National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership

## **Appendix 4**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **Doctorate in Education Participant Information Sheet**

You are being invited to take part in a research study being completed as part of a Doctorate in Education project. Before you decide whether to be involved it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

#### **Who will conduct the research?**

Louise Elizabeth Thornton  
Staffordshire University  
School of Education  
Leek Road  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire

#### **Title of the Research**

Raising standards through academisation? The Academies Act 2010 and schooling.

#### **What is the aim of the research?**

This part of the study is to try and understand how existing national policy about academies is implemented in academies and how this impacts upon the various education stakeholders.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You are being invited to take part in this study as your school has been through academisation or is in the process of doing so and are therefore in a good position to offer insight into this topic, and express views on how national and local policy have been implemented in your work situation and how it has impacted upon you as an individual.

#### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

You would be asked to take part in an interview taking place at your school. The interview will be based around a semi structured interview

pattern and will take approximately 20-30 minutes. It is intended as an opportunity for you to express your views on the implementation of the national policy concerning academies under the Academies Act 2010 and its impact upon you in your role within the academy. The interview will be tape recorded, and later transcribed into text form.

As part of the presentation of results, your own words may be used in text form. This will be anonymised, so that you cannot be identified from what you said. All of the research data will be stored electronically.

Please note that:

- You can decide to stop the interview at any point
- You need not answer questions that you do not wish to
- Your name will be removed from the information and anonymised. It should not be possible to identify anyone who has taken part in the study.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw during the interview and up to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2015 without giving a reason. If you withdraw from the study all data will be withdrawn and destroyed.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

### **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself

.

### **Contact for further information**

**Researcher: Louise Thornton leicesterdancesport@hotmail.com**

**Supervisor: Tehmina Basit t.n.basit@staffs.ac.uk and Michelle Lowe m.lowe@staffs.ac.uk**

## Appendix 5

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Project title** Raising standards through academisation? The Academies Act 2010 and schooling.

**Researcher's name** Louise Elizabeth Thornton

**Supervisor's name** Tehmina Basit and Michelle Lowe

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped / videotaped during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored electronically for data analysis and destroyed 12 months after completion of the project.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Education, Staffordshire University, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** ..... (Research participant)

**Print name** .....

**Date**

**Position**.....

**Institution**.....

#### Contact details

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