



the education union

ATL academies campaign toolkit

**Advice for members, reps and branches (activists)
campaigning on the issue of academies**

GET INVOLVED

You've joined us. Now join in.

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Introduction

The decision to move a school to become an academy is one of the most important decisions a governing body will ever make about the future of education in your community. This decision will have far reaching consequences for teaching professionals, students, parents and the community – voices who ATL firmly believe must be at the forefront of any decision to move your school to an academy.

This toolkit aims to equip reps and active members (activists) with the tools and arguments to lead members, staff and the wider community together in a collective campaign on the issue of academies. Its starting point is that campaigns must be local, inclusive and give members a genuine say over their working lives. It will provide arguments to take to members and the community about the fallacies surrounding academy status, the undemocratic process by which they can be formed and both the long and short term consequences of such a decision.

Furthermore it will provide you - members, reps and branches (activists) - with a useful framework to shape your campaign. Campaigns can take many forms, be large or small, but should always consider the group being asked to be involved, the issues they face, and what they can do about it. These questions have never been as important as they are right now. To ensure members at your school have a genuine voice in the Academy debate, now is the time to **get involved**.

To use this toolkit effectively it should be used in conjunction with the ATL website which contains useful information, FAQ sheets, model resolutions, petitions and advice designed to assist you in your academy campaign. The webpage www.atl.org.uk/reps-toolbox/academy-reps.asp (for reps and activists) and www.atl.org.uk/academiescampaign (for members) are updated on a regular basis to ensure you have the most up-to-date information.

Finally, your union, ATL, prides itself on being a member-led union and believes that by working together we can campaign to achieve a fair education system for all through activity and real engagement with members and the wider public.

Why get involved?

This question is fundamental to getting people involved in your campaign. In order to get people involved, they need to understand and care about the issues central to the campaign, in this case the risks and negative impact of their schools becoming academies.

We believe the issue is important for some of the following reasons:

- The **lack of clarity around consultation**. The original proposals set out by the current government outlined that governing bodies of schools rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, could simply pass a resolution to turn your school into an academy with no requirement to consult with anyone. However, we believe that due to the resonance of our campaign so far, a new clause was added to the Bill to ensure that the governing body of a maintained school carries out a consultation exercise with '**those persons whom they think appropriate**'. While this statement does not clarify with who, or how, this consultation should take place, ATL believes that staff, parents and the community are all 'appropriate persons', and that meaningful consultation must be undertaken *before* a governing body votes on a change in status.
- The freedom for governing bodies of academies to set their own **pay, terms and conditions**. This can have both short and long term impacts for teaching staff and could see a gradual erosion of nationally negotiated standards of employment.
- Changes to **curriculum, teaching and learning**. The capacity for newly formed academies to digress from the national curriculum could have far-reaching consequences for teaching staff and students.
- Potential **changes to school term times** and the school day including **Saturday opening**.
- There is **no evidence** that academies improve educational attainment of young people, that they improve teaching and learning, or that they improve opportunities or the lives of students, staff or their local communities.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and more information can be found on the ATL website via www.atl.org.uk/academiescampaign and www.atl.org.uk/reps-toolbox/academy-reps.asp.

Educating members around the issues and arguments is the first step of any campaign.

What can you do?

As an active member (leader) of your union, your involvement is critical to the success of the campaign, however, it would be unrealistic to run the campaign on your own. Below is a list of ideas to generate collective activity in your workplace.

1. ELECT AN ATL REPRESENTATIVE

If there is no ATL representative, talk to other ATL members about electing one. Having a rep will be helpful in ensuring that your school is well organised and able to run an effective campaign. It may also be critical in ensuring there is ongoing consultation and dialogue with the school over this and future decisions.

As an ATL representative, you will have plenty of support via your ATL branch so ensure that you contact them as soon as possible. If you do not know who your branch is, this can be found on the ATL website, www.atl.org.uk.

More details about what being an ATL representative entails can be found on the ATL website www.atl.org.uk/rebs-toolbox/new-reps.asp.

2. HOLD A MEETING

One of the best ways to ensure everyone has the opportunity to be brought up to date is to hold a meeting. It is important to remember that members have the legal right to hold union meetings in a range of circumstances. Advice on the ATL website www.atl.org.uk/rebs-toolbox/considering-academy-status.asp will help you understand your legal rights when holding meetings, with both staff and parents.

Who to invite?

When considering who to invite it is essential to consider the purpose of the meeting. An initial meeting is essential to raise awareness on the issue of academies and should therefore be open to **all** staff. By being inclusive your campaign can benefit by:

- giving non-members an opportunity and reason to join
- promoting joint union working
- sending a clear message to the governing body that the majority of staff are engaged and working collectively on this issue.

To ensure **all** parties have an opportunity to attend it is important to consider the following:

- Discuss it with other union reps/activists who will be responsible for inviting staff – depending on the size of your school you may wish to nominate more than one person.

- How will you word your invitation? By using positive, inclusive language people will be more likely to attend, ie '*How does your school becoming an academy affect you? Come to a meeting to find out more... All welcome*'. Avoid negative statements as this may serve to alienate people who aren't locked into a position as yet or who may see it as not relevant to them.
- Work with other unions to ensure the whole staff community is invited, that is all recognised unions' members – teachers (including supply), support staff and administrative staff.
- Give everyone enough notice.
- How you will let everyone know? Consider a range of methods – email, notice board, conversation etc.

When and where to hold the meeting?

As it may be difficult to hold a meeting with all staff at the same time, it might be worth thinking about having a series of meetings so that as many people as possible have the opportunity to attend.

Factors to consider could include:

- Is there a time of the week when the majority of staff are already gathered? Could you benefit from this and attach your meeting to the end?
- Is the school the best place to hold the meeting – can people speak freely?
- Would an off site meeting make it easier or more difficult for people to attend?
- What time of the day are you most likely to get attendance – directly after school, lunch breaks, before school or a combination of different times?

Purpose of the meeting

The central purpose of the meeting should be to raise awareness on the issues surrounding academies. A well-organised meeting will ensure all parties are engaged in the topic and by presenting clear arguments on why academies do not serve the community as well as asking for feedback you will ensure the meeting runs smoothly. To assist you, information can be found on the ATL website along with factsheets for you to distribute at the meeting www.atl.org.uk/reps-toolbox/academy-reps.asp. Should you need assistance running the meeting please feel free to contact your branch secretary or lead organiser who will be only too happy to be able to help you.

Another important aspect of running a meeting is to get 'buy in' to your campaign. By asking members to 'do something' (see below for examples) once they leave the meeting you will ensure your campaign develops momentum.

A meeting may also be an opportune time to call for people to sit on an academy campaign committee.

3. SET UP A CAMPAIGN TEAM - FORM A COMMITTEE

Part of the meeting above should cover what action will be taken and by whom. Ideally, the campaign will not be the work of one individual, but of a team. The best way to organise this and maintain momentum would be to form a campaign committee. A campaign committee will mean that all work does not fall to one person but that decisions and activity are shared and that any actions required to run a successful campaign are performed strategically: actions are given to those with the best abilities to perform them, ie the teacher governor may be well placed to talk to other governors or there may be someone ideally suited to explore using the local media or talking to parents.

The committee should comprise of representatives from all interested groups in your school. This will include representatives from the teaching staff, support staff as well as ensuring, where relevant, that all unions are also represented. However representatives should also include those who will be responsible for specific tasks, ie:

- publicity – this could range from designing a petition to liaising with local press
- making contact with various interest groups, ie local parent groups
- liaising with various trades unions
- research
- organisation of future meetings, etc; if this is a joint union committee it may be beneficial to ensure that the role of chair for meetings changes on a meeting by meeting basis
- recruitment – see below for clarification
- communication – it is important that the campaign committee keeps members updated and so part of the committee work would be to agree what and when to share information and how to do this.

4. ENSURE EVERYONE IS IN THE UNION

When campaigning, size does matter. If we can show that all staff and significant members of the local community are behind us, we have a greater chance of success. Issues that staff members feel strongly about can also provide a good opportunity to recruit new members and recruiting new members not only strengthens the campaign but will also help ensure ongoing union negotiation strength. Part of the remit of the campaign committee should therefore include targeting and talking to non union members.

Joining ATL can be done in a number of ways:

- online at www.atl.org.uk/join
- telephone - 0845 057 7000
- by post or fax – forms can be printed off from the ATL website (first bullet point, above) and sent to ATL, FREEPOST 7363, 7 Northumberland Street, London or faxed to 020 7930 1359. If you are an ATL rep you will be sent membership forms on a regular basis.

5. **LOBBY THE GOVERNING BODY**

As the governing body is the key decision maker in whether your school is converted into an academy - without a governing body vote in favour the change cannot go ahead - it is crucial to ensure it is faced with the concerns of your entire school community.

By showing a united front, and by demonstrating that you have engaged a broad audience, the governing body should understand the resistance they may face should they take the decision to alter the status of your school.

This toolkit provides the following tools to assist you with this:

1. a postcard (addressed to the chair of governors)
2. a model resolution (to be passed by the governing body itself)
3. a model petition for parents
4. FAQs for governors.

Postcard

A postcard of protest is available for you to order from ATL's despatch partner – just call 0845 4500 009. By asking as many people to sign it as possible and by delivering the cards en masse to the governing body, this activity will send a strong message that there is genuine opposition to any proposal to turn your school into an academy.

Ways of maximising signatures could include:

- setting a deadline on when all cards must be returned
- nominating key contacts who will be responsible for collecting the signed postcards – this could be members of the campaign committee, union rep, an active parent or anyone who is willing to help
- asking all staff to sign it
- asking all staff to collect five or more signatures from the school community
- entrusting an active parent/s to retrieve signatures from other parents, grandparents, family members or anyone who has a vested interest in education in your area
- asking contacts in neighbouring schools to sign it – this issue impacts everyone.

Model resolution and covering letter

There is a model resolution for governing bodies to consider. By sending a copy of this resolution to the governing body alongside a covering letter, signed by all staff, this will send a clear message of the expectation of all staff in the school. Downloaded the model resolution and covering letter from the ATL website at www.atl.org.uk/rebs-toolbox/considering-academy-status.asp.

A petition for parents

Alerting active parents that they have a part to play in the campaign will strengthen your call for full and proper consultation with all stakeholders. The link below provides a petition parents and carers can use to collect signatures and therefore ensures the governing body are hearing a range of concerned voices. You can also download the petition from the ATL website at www.atl.org.uk/rebs-toolbox/considering-academy-status.asp

FAQs for governors

A key part of the campaign is to harness any support you may have from among the governing body. Governors who may be sympathetic could include both staff and parent governors. A FAQ sheet has been provided to arm them with the relevant arguments to consider and distribute to other governors. You can access the FAQ sheet by using the same link as for accessing the petition for parents, above.

6. DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION

ATL has put together FAQ sheets for both **parents** and **staff**, as well as a **combined FAQ for parents, staff and governors**. It is important that these materials are distributed and discussed so that as many people as possible are kept up to date with the issues surrounding academies. The FAQ sheets can be found on the ATL website via www.atl.org.uk/rebs-toolbox/academy-reps.asp.

Additionally you can download a 'Whats at risk' flyer from our website, which has been produced to promote discussion among staff. The flyer could be a helpful tool to generate interest in the topic of academies and could be placed on notice boards, left in staff rooms or anywhere you think it will be read. You can access the flyer from the ATL website or by clicking on the link www.atl.org.uk/rebs-toolbox/considering-academy-status.asp.

7. TALK TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE – 121 CONVERSATIONS

It may sound common sense, but sometimes we forget that the best way to get your message across is to have a conversation with someone.

Often when we are campaigning we become distracted with all of the other elements of the campaign and forget to take the time to talk to people one to one. Additionally, tasking people involved in your campaign to talk to others ensures your message reaches a broad audience and that we we don't take for granted people's views and understanding of the issue.

In a campaign sense, conversations can be a strategic part of your activity:

- ask everyone involved in the campaign to talk to others in the community – we can't assume people will know about the issues just because we do
- clear up any misinformation the person may have
- follow up with the person on any outstanding matter not dealt with in the conversation
- use the conversation to ask for help in the campaign, ie ask them to talk to others, sign a petition etc.

8. ENGAGE PARENTS/COMMUNITY

Ensuring parents are on board with your campaign is critical to strengthening the level of opposition to academies in your school. Talking to parents can be difficult in the day-to-day running of your school however considering how to engage this important group in the campaign needs some consideration.

Remember, the parents FAQs will be a useful tool for engaging parents in a discussion about the risks and implications of becoming an academy.

Ideally, you will know the best way to ensure parents are kept up to date and informed however some suggestions could include:

- Identify active parents in your school, meet with them and ask how they might let other parents know and encourage them to lead a parent driven aspect to the campaign.
- Are there any parent forums you could link into – request a place to speak at any upcoming meetings.
- Hold a forum for parents after school – this can be an ideal opportunity to inform parents of your concerns and ask them to get on board.
- Leaflet all parents after or before school – it is important to note that this could be seen as an aggressive position by heads and governing bodies, so would need to be done at a strategic point in your campaign. Please read our [website guidance](http://www.atl.org.uk/Images/Academy%20applications%20and%20staff) or www.atl.org.uk/Images/Academy%20applications%20and%20staff

[%20meetings.pdf](#) (page 3, 'communicating with parents') about the legal dos and don'ts before you leaflet parents.

Additionally, keeping members of the community informed and onside is another important aspect of your campaign. This toolkit suggests a range of activities you could implement however listed below are some more suggestions:

- Identify sectors in the community that may be sympathetic – ie charity groups, churches, third sector groups, sport groups, youth groups, etc. Set up meetings with leaders in these sectors and see how you can work together.
- Leaflet areas around your school – these could include: supermarkets, sporting venues, fairs, local authority events, etc.
- Set up a stall in a highly visible location and ask the community to sign a petition – this would provide an excellent opportunity to talk to people face to face.

9. LOBBY COUNCILLORS

This is important as it can help to galvanise community support for your campaign. Local councillors will have access to various community and special interest groups and will also have experience of campaigning that may be helpful to you. Your local authority website should provide you with details of your local councillors, how to contact them and details of up and coming surgeries, ie in Sheffield information can be found on this webpage www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/councillors.

10. USE THE MEDIA

You may find that the community your school serves may not know enough about academies to feel any objection to them or simply do not know enough about your concerns to support you. This is why getting your message to as wide an audience as possible is important. One way to do this is to utilise your local press and radio.

You can contact your local paper, contact details of which can usually be found 'googling' the paper in question. You may consider whether to contact the press to cover any activity or send in letters to the letters page. Alternatively you may wish to get positive stories in the local radio www.radio-now.co.uk/main.htm or they may well contact you.

Using the media can take us out of our comfort zone. However if you contact your branch secretary or organiser first to talk it through and to check that your message fits in with ATL policy, this will help you gain confidence. Try to have a clear message, keep your language simple and stick to a few strong points that can easily be identified with. Remember, the reporter will want the interview to be successful too. If you have any

concerns about using the media, contact your local ATL Branch for advice and support.

11. CONNECT WITH OTHER SCHOOLS IN YOUR AREA

The decision to change your school status will have an effect on surrounding schools. It is also possible that yours is not the only school in the area considering this change or that your school will become an academy in partnership with another school. These represent opportunities to work with other staff members and to pool ideas and resources. Another area of support and information could be a local school which has already made this change.

12. BALLOT FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION

A major example of collective activity is balloting for industrial action. Normally this would occur when all other attempts to resolve issues have failed. For this to be successful, it would be important that members all feel strongly about this issue which is why keeping members involved and informed throughout the campaign is important. Further details can be found on www.atl.org.uk/help-and-advice/union-rights/industrial-action.asp.

13. STAY INFORMED

The ATL website is kept up to date with resources and information to assist you in your campaign, see www.atl.org.uk/rep-toolbox/academy-reps.asp and www.atl.org.uk/academiescampaign. Another important resource will be the DfE website www.education.gov.uk/academies, which will have up to date information from the government on academies. Through your ATL branch you will also find out about future regional meetings and/or training events etc.

ATL has been very vocal on the issue of academies. On the ATL website and through the links below you will find position statements, press releases and relevant information.

[ATL statement on Academies Bill - 25th May 2010](#) or www.atl.org.uk/media-office/media-archive/ATL-says-Academies-Bill-is-irresponsible.asp

[ATL Statement on turning outstanding schools into academies - 26th May 2010](#) or www.atl.org.uk/media-office/media-archive/ATL-appalled-by-the-bizarre-process-to-turn-outstanding-schools-into-academies.asp.

14. KEEP ATL INFORMED

It is very important that you keep in touch with us so that we can ensure that you have the support you require. You can contact ATL via the contact form on the ATL website www.atl.org.uk/contact-us/academies-contact.asp or through your local ATL branch. As the breadth of issues is extensive, you may require external support, particularly in the process of consultation. Your local branch secretary and ATL staff are only too happy to help.

Additionally, in order for ATL to work as effectively as possible, up to date information is critical for the campaign to be successful. For this reason it is important that you keep ATL informed on whether your school is considering becoming an academy by emailing academies@atl.org.uk.

Planning and developing your campaign

In order to develop a campaign plan it is often useful to consider the strengths and weaknesses and external factors which may affect it. This is often called a 'SWOT' analysis, which can be done simply by asking the following questions:

What are the **strengths** of your campaign?

Some examples could include: high union membership, a sympathetic staff/parent governor, an active rep, high level of support and awareness of the issues amongst the membership and support from parents to name a few.

What are the **weaknesses** of your campaign?

Possible weaknesses could include: low union membership, low awareness of the membership on the issues, no elected union rep, staff or parents who are supportive of academy status.

What are the **opportunities** for your campaign?

Things to consider could include: is the staff governor a union member? Is there support in the community? What are other schools in the area doing? Which staff members have their children at school? Are there any parent groups or community group meetings coming up? Are there any key future events which will offer you excellent publicity and exposure?

What are the **threats** to your campaign?

Potential threats could include: tight timeframes, governing bodies and heads who are enthusiastic about changing the school status, lack of consultation.

It is important to revisit this analysis as your campaign develops as elements may change. Always ensure other members of your campaign group are aware of the analysis.

The campaign plan

1. Timelines

- Establish a campaign calendar.
- Over how long will you develop the campaign? To some extent the timelines will be set for you however you will need to consider important dates such as: when will the governing body be meeting and what can be done before then, eg a petition etc?
- At what stages will you review and evaluate the success of the campaign? If the school does opt for academy status, this will change the focus of your campaign but should not stop it. It will be important to ensure all staff are unionised so that current pay, terms and conditions are not compromised. In effect, there may be no more important time to be a member of a union as everything will be up for grabs.

2. Activity

- It is important that that you do not act alone so discuss and agree who will do what activity and for what purpose? This can go beyond the school staff as there is support from your local branch and ATL staff.
- What is your message? A clear message is very important and will give all members of your campaign a purpose. Consider messages of fairness, consultation and respect for nationally negotiated pay, terms and conditions.
- Set benchmarks to evaluate and review campaign

3. Resources/budget

- Consider what costs may be incurred during the campaign? If these are beyond your budget, are there other ways to achieve the same outcome?
- Consider how much time campaign activity will take. Again, do not be afraid to ask for help as it is important that all activity does not fall to you.

4. Potential offensive and defensive strategies

- Understand the employer's strengths and weaknesses.
- Know your campaign's strengths and weaknesses.

- Spell out strategy – who is assigned, who should be involved and when?
- Establish a media strategy, if needed.
- Consider the unexpected. How could it impact upon the campaign?
- How will you publicise your success to the wider membership and education community?

5. Review

- There may be times during the campaign that you will need to refocus and reflect on your campaign objectives. You need to ensure that you do this so that the campaign remains realistic

Ask the question 'what else?' so all members involved in the campaign can contribute their ideas and views at each stage.

Campaign messages

Be inclusive

Having a lot of support from diverse groups should give strength to your campaign. This means that you will need to consider the question: why should groups such as parents, the local community, all school staff, governors and local councillors support you?

It is fair to say that there may be different answers to these questions depending on the particular group you are addressing. Staff may be concerned over the threat to their pay, terms and conditions whereas parents may be concerned that specific support for their children could be withdrawn. Parents may also worry that their children, not yet at school, could be denied a place should the school change its admissions policy. These are just some of the possible concerns groups may have and it is important to consider the audience you are talking to when delivering your campaign messages.

Bringing all of these messages together however, should be a key aim when considering your campaign. Elements of the current academy proposals which strike through all effected groups include issues of **fairness, democracy, consultation** and the **potential threat to the continued performance of your school**.

Involve people

Listen to what members and other groups have to say and encourage them to contribute their ideas and concerns. Ask them to be involved in the campaign by giving them achievable tasks such as speaking to colleagues in their school or distributing materials.

Keep growing

By having a campaign, you will demonstrate to all members and potential members that ATL is pro-active and member led. Advertise your campaign and raise its profile with the wider ATL membership. Email organise@atl.org.uk and communications@atl.org.uk to include your activity in ATL's *Being a rep* newsletter or potentially in *Report* magazine. Also consider advertising your campaign in your branch newsletter by emailing your branch secretary.

Keep informed

Regularly check the ATL website www.atl.org.uk/rep-toolbox/academy-reps.asp and www.atl.org.uk/academiescampaign.

Appendix 1

Key contacts

Key contacts

The website

The best place to start will be the ATL website. We have created a link directly to our academy campaign page which is full of useful information.

Members, non-members and the wider public should see www.atl.org.uk/academiescampaign.

For reps and active members, extra resources are available at www.atl.org.uk/reps-toolbox/academy-reps.asp.

These resources offer you links to materials for members in schools who are considering academy status, who have decided to convert to academy status or for those working in academies so please ensure you choose the correct web pages.

Email

In order to keep ATL informed on whether your school is thinking of moving to academy status please email us at academies@atl.org.uk or info@atl.org.uk.

If you are a rep or a member who is keen to be more involved and take a lead in your workplace, contact us via the ATL website page www.atl.org.uk/reps-toolbox/existing-academies.asp.

Branch secretary

Keeping your branch secretary informed on what's going on in your school will be vital. To look up you branch details please visit the ATL website and use the 'Find my branch' search function on the bottom right hand side of the homepage www.atl.org.uk.

ATL's organising team

ATL's team of field-based organisers can provide advice, expertise and support for reps and active members who are campaigning in their school to ensure their voice is heard before the governing body takes a vote.

To contact an organiser please email organise@atl.org.uk.