

# Federation Protocol

**1.1** The term federation is often used loosely to describe a family of schools but it is actually a formal and legal agreement by which up to five schools share a single governing body which is formally reconstituted. Federations can involve a mix of primary, special and secondary schools of any type or size.

**1.2** The decision to federate is made locally by the governing bodies of the individual schools following a consultation process with their community and key partners. There will be a number of different reasons why schools decide to federate but for some schools Federation would bring few benefits and should not be considered.

**1.3** There are no blueprints for federation and the design or operational workings of a federation will depend entirely on the circumstances of those individual schools and the focus or purpose of their partnership. It is governors through a stepped planning process who work out the detail of their federation.

**1.4** The most important factor for the consideration of federation must be because such an arrangement would bring benefits for the children and young people in those schools by enhancing educational provision.

**1.5** There are formal consultation processes to follow when schools propose federation. The governors of each school are required to consult with key stakeholders including parents, staff, the Local Authority and other appropriate partners or community groups. Church schools will need to involve the Diocese. The unions will be involved in any consultation about proposed changes to staffing structures or conditions of service. They can also make representation on behalf of staff during the initial consultation period.

**1.6** A local decision to federate will not override the need for the LA to intervene or act on school improvement or organisation issues.

**1.7** The LA has four functions. These are:

- To be formally consulted. The LA will either support or oppose federation of particular schools. There will be no blanket, one size fits all policy. Any decision, to either support or to oppose will be made according to the individual circumstances and sustainability of such an arrangement.
- To give information and advice to those schools considering and implementing federation processes.
- To issue the new Instrument of Government as a new governing body is formed.
- To monitor the effectiveness and impact of federations through its normal school improvement procedures.

**1.8** The following pointers act as a prompt for further exploration and discussion between the LA and schools. This conversation can be prompted by governors or the LA as part of its responsibility to monitor schools. This will take place where a federation can secure:

- A significant contribution to standards, breadth of curriculum provision and improvements to the quality of learning for all members of the school community.
- Recruitment of staff, headteachers and governors particularly if there have been difficulties.
- Support for schools in difficulty.
- Opportunities to maximise resources and professional expertise particularly where there are financial difficulties or low pupil numbers.
- Access to better facilities for pupils in schools with accommodation issues.
- A partnership structure for delivering extended services at a local level.
- Opportunities for the creation of new roles that can be shared across schools, e.g. bursar, ICT technician.

**1.9** Formal collaboration between schools can bring the following benefits but these need not necessarily be gained through federation alone:

- Practitioner exchange that combats professional isolation and shares the workload.
- Schools with many strengths and a good record of collaboration can contribute to the learning of others.
- Opportunities for school leadership beyond a single school.
- Better work-life balance where the headteacher has a very high level of teaching commitment.

**2.0** There are a number of circumstances where federation would be inappropriate as it brings too few longer term benefits for the school community. These include:

- Geographical location. Where schools are far apart but particularly if the local geography is difficult for quick access between school sites. Travel time and safety must be a consideration.
- Where leadership capacity is weak.
- Where schools are too small.
- Where falling rolls mean that one or more schools in the federation might become educationally unviable within three years.
- Where arrangements might be predatory, leading to resources from one school being used to subsidise another.

# federation protocol



Exploration and testing

Preparation

Defining

Implementation

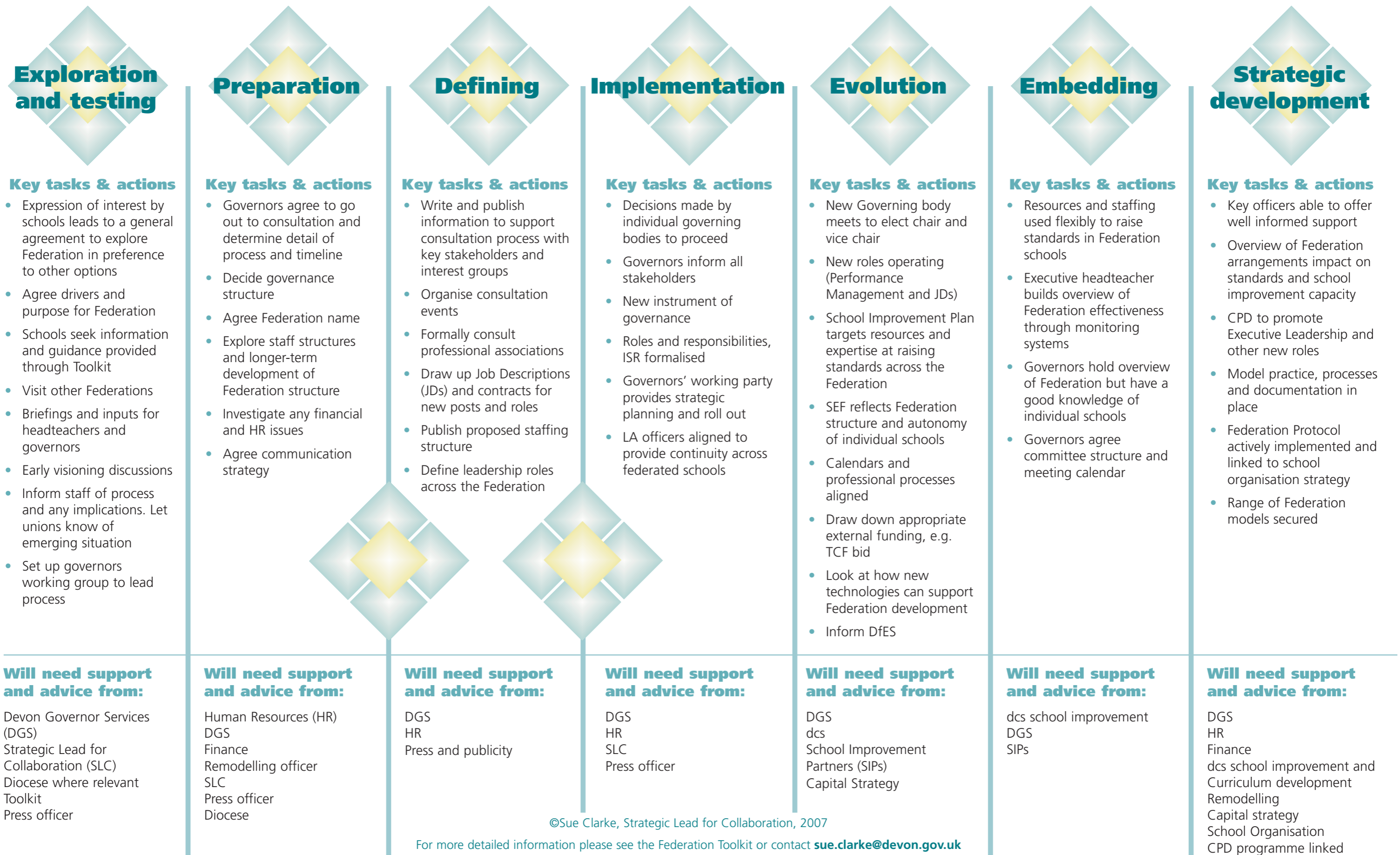
Evolution

Embedding

Strategic development

# Federation process chart showing Local Authority support and input

This chart shows the Federation process as a continuum throughout which Devon County Council is able to offer support to governors and headteachers. The journey towards Federation is driven by the schools themselves but they will need to access and draw upon high quality expertise and advice. This advice should closely match the Federation's development at each stage of their individual process. Federation moves from Exploration and Testing towards Embedding and Strategic Development. This chart highlights key actions and support required at each stage of the Federation process.



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For more detailed information please see the Federation Toolkit or contact [sue.clarke@devon.gov.uk](mailto:sue.clarke@devon.gov.uk)