



Department  
for Education

## RISE Operations Working Group 10 December minutes

These minutes reflect discussion and recommendations from the RISE Operations Working Group. They do not represent formal policy decisions.

### Attendees

For this meeting, there were 17 attendees in total. The meeting **was** quorate.

#### Permanent attendees:

- Tim Coulson, Director General of Regions Group, DfE (Chair)
- Jon Howlin, Senior Responsible Officer RISE Programme, DfE (Deputy Chair)
- Mark Davis, DDE for Lichfield Diocese, representing Church of England schools, West Midlands.
- Lee Wilson, CEO of Outwood Grange Academies Trust, North East.
- Amanda Corcoran Director of Education, Manchester City Council & Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), North West.
- Joanne Sanchez-Thompson National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and National Governance Association, East Midlands.
- John Camp, CEO of the Compass Partnership of Schools, London.
- Stephen Wheatley, CEO of All Saints Catholic Academies Trust. Catholic Education Service, East of England.
- Dr Jennifer Blunden, CEO of Truro and Penwith Academy, South East.
- Rebecca Meredith, Chief Executive of Transform, East Midlands.
- Tony Wilson, Director of the Diocese of Oxford, South West.

#### Attendees by exception:

- Vanessa Ogden, Chief Executive Mulberry School Trust
- Lucy Living Regional Director for the South West and RISE Programme Sponsor, DfE
- Beth Henshaw, RISE Programme Director
- Andrew Ford, School Improvement and Trust Policy
- Douglas Leckie, Head of RISE Universal
- Charlotte Taylor, Targeted Services Lead
- Shelley Cooper, RISE PMO Lead, DfE (Secretariat)

#### Apologies from:

- Gail Brown, CEO of the Ebor Academy Trust, Yorkshire and Humber.

## Papers presented and key reflections

For this board, there were 6 papers presented. The full discussion around each paper can be found in the relevant section within the agenda below

### 1. Terms of Reference (agenda item 2) presented by Beth Henshaw

**Terms of reference were agreed**, these would be kept under review as the programme evolves.

The group also agreed

- a succinct description of the group role to be shared externally for consistent messaging.
- programme communications should be reframed with a more positive tone - there is a strong appetite for more frequent updates and messaging that feels “alive” and practical.
- there are opportunities to strengthen co-construction and programme engagement with trust leaders.

### 2. RISE Policy Overview (agenda Item 3) presented by Andrew Ford

The group agreed

- the importance of using language consistent with the new Ofsted scorecard. programme success should not be solely to Ofsted “exceptionality”; there should be a focus on strong, replicable practice rather than rare outstanding examples

### 3. Universal RISE delivery (agenda item 4) presented by Douglas Leckie

The group agreed

- focus programme communications on the Universal RISE offer; awareness is growing, and further communications will strengthen engagement
- position Universal RISE as the core RISE offer, targeted RISE should be viewed as the additional support rather than the defining feature of the programme.

### 4. Targeted RISE delivery (agenda item 5) presented by Charlotte Taylor

The group agreed

- local intelligence/knowledge from Local Authorities and MATs would be shared ahead of matching targeted schools.
- the programme team should explore data-driven analysis of why schools enter targeted RISE to shape the development of the Universal Offer.
- clarity and transparency of the matching process to supporting organisations will be enhanced.

- responsible bodies will retain clear accountability for school improvement to clearly communicate the programme is evidence-led and continuously refined to deliver the best outcomes.

## New actions

For this meeting, 1 new action was agreed.

Action 1: RISE PMO to attach shareable cleared version of slides with the minutes.

## Agenda and Notes

Below are the full minutes taken from the meeting, split by agenda item. There were **5** agenda items in total.

### 1. Welcome and Introductions (Tim Coulson)

Tim opened the meeting by welcoming attendees. Tim acknowledged that the RISE programme was still evolving to meet sector need. He noted the importance of the Operations Group in giving frank feedback and operational insight to shape delivery of the programme to enable RISE to achieve its aspirations

### 2. Terms of Reference (Beth Henshaw)

Beth presented the draft Terms of Reference for the Operations Group, noting that that this is not a decision-making board. The group's role is to provide recommendations to inform the RISE programme's operational & delivery practice and stakeholder engagement approach. The group's recommendations will feed into the wider governance structure as defined in the terms of reference. Unless otherwise stated, discussions at the meeting are considered confidential and conflicts of interest should be highlighted at the beginning of each session or to RISE PMO as soon as they arise.

#### Discussion

Attendees discussed how they would describe the RISE programme in a single line. The programme was described as a mix of targeted and universal: focused where need is greatest but with a support offer accessible to all schools. Attendees discussed the collaborative and sector-shaped delivery model, designed with schools, trusts, and local authorities to strengthen the system and to build local capacity. The programme was deemed to be led by those closest to school improvement, it is focused on long-term solutions: driving sustained improvement. Stronger engagement with local partners would improve the quality of supporting organisation matching, identify synergies and allow better coordination of local school improvement activity and resources.

The group reflected on early programme delivery and agreed that

- a succinct description of the group role to be shared externally for consistent messaging.
- Programme communications should be reframed with a more positive tone - there is a strong appetite for more frequent updates and messaging that feels “alive” and practical.
- there are opportunities to strengthen co-construction and programme engagement with trust leaders.

Terms of reference were agreed, these would be kept under review as the programme evolves.

### **3. RISE Policy Overview (Andrew Ford)**

Andrew provided an overview of RISE’s vision: a self-improving system combining Targeted RISE for schools facing the greatest challenges and Universal RISE to enable all schools to access tools, networks, and hubs. Targeted RISE is a new approach to put an effective package of support in place for schools with entrenched challenges but have the capacity to improve. Universal RISE is the offer to support all schools, approximately 21,000 of them in England, on their improvement journey, to build a self-improving innovative schools’ system that openly shares and learns from best practice. A diagnostic tool is under development to enable benchmarking with truly comparative schools and signpost to good sources of support to address specific challenges from a Local Authority, Trust or a DfE hub.

#### **Discussion**

Attendees welcomed the clarity of the vision. The group discussed eligibility for the targeted programme in light of the introduction of the Ofsted scorecard. There was uncertainty about whether inspection timelines or judgments change when a school is in RISE and members requested a clarity on this.

The group agreed

- the importance of using language consistent with the new Ofsted scorecard.
- programme success should not be solely to Ofsted “exceptionality”; there should be a focus on strong, replicable practice rather than rare outstanding examples

### **4. Universal RISE Delivery (Douglas Leckie)**

Douglas provided an update on Universal RISE, which is being delivered regionally and mobilised around the four national priorities announced by the Secretary of State in March 2025: Attendance, Attainment, Reception Year, and Inclusive Mainstream. A series of conferences has already taken place and received positive feedback, with mainstream inclusion conferences planned for the spring term 2026. Work is underway to strengthen regional networks, and the regional webpages have now launched. In addition, development has begun on a digital diagnostic tool to support benchmarking and self-improvement. Douglas confirmed that January will see a renewed focus on raising

awareness of Universal RISE and driving deeper engagement with school improvement planning.

## **Discussion**

The group emphasised the need to position Universal RISE as an inclusive offer for all schools, messaging must highlight that every school can benefit from and contribute to the programme. Even schools facing significant challenges have elements of strong practice that can inform improvement across the system. The group reflected on the ethos of mutual accountability and improvement. Members agreed that RISE should promote a culture where schools seek to be the best they can be while supporting others—a “double lift” approach that strengthens the entire schools’ system.

The discussion also highlighted the need for dynamic regional webpages that showcase live activity and networks, rather than static contact lists. This visibility would help schools and trusts engage more easily and enable RISE advisers to connect local expertise.

The group also agreed

- focus programme communications on the Universal RISE offer; awareness is growing, and further communications will strengthen engagement
- position Universal RISE as the core RISE offer, targeted RISE should be viewed as the additional support rather than the defining feature of the programme.

## **5. Targeted RISE Delivery (Charlotte Taylor)**

Charlotte outlined the Targeted RISE service model and its key stages. Schools enter the programme when they meet eligibility criteria and are assigned a RISE Adviser. The model is not one-size-fits-all—schools follow different routes depending on their needs. Charlotte shared common themes emerging from school improvement plans, including curriculum quality, attendance, and leadership capacity. The programme now operates in multiple phases, with 370 schools actively in the process across three cohorts. Processes have been refined based on lessons learned, and continuous improvement will continue.

## **Discussion**

The group reflected on progress with targeted RISE and suggested that RISE Advisers could lack contextual knowledge when working outside their usual area. Members stressed the vital role of supporting organisations and the need to actively engage strong trusts and local authorities in the programme. The discussion highlighted the shift toward more bespoke, collaborative school improvement plans, with creative models drawing on multiple partners rather than a single provider. Showcasing these examples was seen as key to demonstrating the programme’s value across the education sector. The group agreed that stronger communication, visible recognition of contributors, and transparent sharing of lessons learned are essential to build confidence and engagement with the programme.

The group agreed

- local intelligence/knowledge from Local Authorities and MATs would be shared ahead of matching targeted schools.
  - The programme team should explore data-driven analysis of why schools enter targeted RISE to shape the development of the Universal Offer.
  - Clarity and transparency of the matching process to supporting organisations will be enhanced.
  - responsible bodies will retain clear accountability for school improvement
- to clearly communicate the programme is evidence-led and continuously refined to deliver the best outcome

## **6. AOB and close (Tim Coulson)**

Tim thanked members for their engagement and the rich discussion. He explained that RISE advisers were monitoring initial impact for the first cohorts of schools eligible for Targeted support. This data from this monitoring will be shared at the next meeting. The group would meet half termly initially during this stage of the programme, and the next meeting would be scheduled during early 2026.

Jon Howlin, Senior Responsible Owner, thanked the group for sharing their reflections and expertise. At future meetings Jon was keen to test communication strategy, explore tricky operational issues, as well as how the RISE programme can best maximise the skills, expertise and successful initiatives in the sector.

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