



Department
for Education

RISE Operations Working Group 20 March minutes

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

Chairs

Chair: Tim Coulson, Director General of Regions Group, DfE

Deputy chair: Jon Howlin, Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) RISE, DfE

Members

Mark Davis · Lee Wilson · Amanda Corcoran · Joanne Sanchez-Thompson · John Camp · Gail Brown · Stephen Wheatley · Tony Wilson · Rebecca Meredith CBE · Dr Jennifer Blunden

Attendance

A total of 15 attendees were present, including members and invited colleagues from regional RISE teams, policy leads and engagement functions.

Members in attendance

Mark Davis · Lee Wilson · Joanne Sanchez-Thompson · Stephen Wheatley · Rebecca Meredith CBE · Dr Jennifer Blunden

Attendees by exception

Helen Pledger · Nigel Minns · Suzie Carr · Gemma Bauxer · Mark Foster · Douglas Leckie · Paul Green · Oluwakemi Ogunsakin · Alice Dempsey

Apologies

John Camp · Gail Brown

Papers presented and purpose

Four agenda items were circulated in advance. The meeting centred on regional planning, evaluation work, and forward planning.

1. Welcome, Introduction and Feedback – Tim Coulson
2. Universal RISE Regional Plans – Douglas Leckie

3. Targeted RISE Evaluation Questions – Paul Green
4. Any Other Business (AOB) – Tim Coulson

Meeting minutes

Below are the full minutes taken from the meeting.

1. Welcome and Introductions (Tim Coulson)

Tim and Jon welcomed participants and outlined the aims of the meeting.

2. Universal RISE Regional Plans (Douglas Leckie)

Douglas presented the purpose and direction of the regional plans, emphasising their role in:

- Strengthening engagement with Universal RISE.
- Providing clarity and coherence around the offer.
- Supporting shared improvement through coordinated regional planning.

He confirmed expected publication timelines and the intention for annual updates.

East Midlands Case Study

Regional colleagues outlined how their approach brings the Universal RISE vision into practice. Key points included:

- A collaborative process shaped by broad sector engagement.
- Priorities focused on reducing variation and enhancing collaboration.
- Core themes such as leadership, governance, openness of practice and effective use of technology.
- Attention to disparities across the region, including support for SEND and rural/coastal communities.
- Work targeting early years quality, inclusion, attendance, attainment and transitions.
- Establishment of 'East Midlands Connect' to align local, regional and national activity.

3. Targeted RISE Evaluation Questions

The group reflected on how evaluation activity is experienced by schools and highlighted the importance of approaches that promote open, honest feedback.

Key points included:

- The need for evaluation methods that feel supportive rather than procedural.
- A preference for dialogue based approaches that build trust.

The group agreed that the external evaluation should incorporate a question on headteacher wellbeing.

4. Any Other Business (AOB) and close (Tim Coulton)

Meeting format and Future Meeting Dates

Members endorsed the streamlined agenda format with fewer items, noting that it supports more focused and meaningful discussion.

The following meeting dates were agreed:

- 14 April
- 12 May
- 16 June

The Chair proposed holding a short additional meeting over the summer. Members supported this, suggesting it be scheduled around A-level or GCSE results when leaders are more likely to be available.

The Chair thanked members for their flexibility and continued engagement. The meeting closed with appreciation from several attendees.

Post meeting notes

A query was raised on whether the new Schools Profile and RISE digital platforms will provide trust level views.

Response

- The *Get School Improvement Insights* tool (launching autumn 2026) will include individual school level information for trusts, with development underway for trust wide performance views.
- RISE resources will be accessible at school level, with further work exploring the inclusion of trust level resources

These minutes will be published on GOV.UK ahead of the next meeting.