



Department  
for Education

# **Launch of the Get Help Buying for Schools Service**

**Government consultation response**

**April 2021**

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## Introduction

The Get Help Buying for Schools service is designed to ensure that buyers and other buying decision makers in schools have access to specialist support, information and tools to buy goods and services efficiently and compliantly, delivering value for money. The service will enable schools to reinvest savings into improving educational attainment and outcomes for pupils.

Get Help Buying for Schools will be launched as a free service and it will not be mandatory for schools to use. Department for Education (DfE) will seek to work alongside existing providers in the market to ensure schools achieve best value from their complex procurements.

The consultation launched on 11th February 2021 and closed on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021. It was widely publicised across DfE and partner channels. The consultation exercise sought views on our chosen in-house delivery model for the Get Help Buying for Schools service and offered stakeholders the opportunity to share their views.

## Who was this for?

- Local Authorities in England
- Governing bodies of local authority maintained schools in England
- Academy trusts
- Church and other foundation and trust bodies
- Public Sector Buying Organisations (PSBOs)
- Private sector organisations providing procurement support to schools
- Private sector organisations supplying goods and services to schools

# About the consultation

## Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) proposed the launch of a Get Help Buying for Schools service, to help schools plan and conduct procurements, helping schools achieve savings on their non-staff spend.

## Context

In 2017 the DfE published the first school's buying strategy. This strategy aimed to support schools to save over £1 billion a year by 2019-20 on their non-staff spend through helping all schools improve how they buy goods and services. This would help schools to maximise available resources to invest in high quality education for their pupils and support them in managing cost pressures.

Our engagement with schools at this time demonstrated that schools often lack the capacity or access to capability to undertake more complex procurement processes. One of the key initiatives first raised in the 2017 school's buying strategy was to provide a national network of direct buying support to schools to address this. Subsequently, the DfE launched Regional Schools Buying Hubs pilots in the North West and South West of England, designed to help understand whether this type of service would be beneficial and make a difference to schools.

The delivery of the Regional Schools Buying Hubs pilots in the North West and South West has demonstrated the value that direct support brings to schools and therefore we intend to launch a national provision.

Our aim is to deliver a user-centred service focused on providing maximum value to schools, aligning with the strategic direction of the school's buying strategy and securing the best return on investment from the public purse.

## Proposed model of the Get Help Buying for Schools service

We have studied the Regional Schools Buying Hubs pilots to understand how we can best move forward to deliver a service for schools nationally and have identified that an in-house delivery model for a Get Help Buying for Schools service will deliver the most beneficial outcomes for our users. The Get Help Buying for Schools service is a national service with the objective of helping schools and academies in England complete procurements for goods and services, from source to contract award, thereby enabling schools to create best value, saving time and money and reducing risk.

DfE is uniquely placed to provide this service in-house. Building the service in-house gives the department the flexibility to develop the service over time to meet market changes and school needs. Furthermore, through resourcing the service through the expansion of an existing team structure we would deliver the highest return on investment for taxpayers.

In the Get Help Buying for Schools service a buyer in a school will hear about the service through our outreach and engagement team. This team would direct users to the Buying for Schools GOV.UK pages where the user will find resources and digital products and encourage use of the service to support their buying journey.

Through user-led research we identified that the ability to 'plan a procurement' and 'create a specification' creates the greatest value for the user as they enable a school to carry out the initial stages of the procurement process effectively. Due to the value of these stages, digital product development has been prioritised to ensure that there is live digital functionality in these areas when the service launches. Our vision of the service beyond launch will be to develop further digital capability to enable schools to self-serve through the whole buying journey digitally. From launch, we will grow and expand our capacity to provide schools further support from procurement specialists when needed. This will offer further advice and guidance as well as conducting a procurement on behalf of the school from source to contract award.

As in the pilot, from launch, schools will be able to access support for the procurement of a selected range of goods and services. Within these areas of spend, the service will offer support in sourcing, identification of suitable frameworks and deals and aggregation opportunities. As evidenced by the pilot, schools will benefit from access to specialist advice and support through the procurement process. The department will continue to work in partnership with established public sector providers of deals for schools, using combined market knowledge and insight to create commercial solutions for schools that meet their needs.

The service will be available to all state-funded primary, secondary, special and alternative provision schools which have some pupils aged 5-16; and to maintained nursery schools. The service will not be provided to private, voluntary and independent early years providers, and institutions that provide only for pupils and students aged 16+. This service will not help schools with contract management at this time, nor would it provide legal advice.

We consulted to obtain feedback from those impacted by our proposal to help us shape the delivery of the service and use the feedback received to inform our decision making.

## Summary of responses

This section sets out the views that we have received in response to the consultation on the proposed launch of the Get Help Buying for Schools service. It also sets out the decisions that have been taken following our consideration of the responses to the consultation. In total there were **352** responses to the consultation. The majority of responses were from local authority maintained schools, academies or multi-academy trusts.

**Table A – Types of respondents**

<b>Mainstream local authority maintained school</b>	94	<b>27%</b>
<b>Special local authority maintained school</b>	8	<b>2%</b>
<b>Academy or free school</b>	69	<b>20%</b>
<b>Multi-academy trust</b>	96	<b>27%</b>
<b>Independent school</b>	1	<b>0%</b>
<b>Independent special school</b>	0	<b>0%</b>
<b>Non-maintained special school</b>	1	<b>0%</b>
<b>Trade/Professional Association</b>	2	<b>1%</b>
<b>Charity</b>	2	<b>1%</b>
<b>Local Authority</b>	14	<b>4%</b>
<b>Public Sector Buying Organisation</b>	6	<b>2%</b>
<b>Schools Buying Body/Organisation</b>	0	<b>0%</b>
<b>Private sector organisations who supply goods and services for schools</b>	26	<b>7%</b>
<b>Private sector organisations who provide procurement support to schools</b>	2	<b>1%</b>
<b>Other</b>	16	<b>5%</b>
<b>Not Applicable - Individual Response</b>	15	<b>4%</b>

## Main findings from the consultation

**The majority of respondents to the consultation were in support of the proposed in-house model and believed Get Help Buying for Schools would add value to their procurement activity.**

Overall the majority of respondents (60%) agreed that the introduction of the chosen in-house delivered model of the new national buying service would have a positive impact on their organisation. 29% of respondents chose neither agree or disagree as their option with a number of them wanting additional details before they could decide or having concerns about how small businesses would be involved. 10% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

There was very strong support for the introduction of a DfE in-house delivered model of a new national buying service with over 80% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Respondents noted that it would add confidence to the procurement process. There was some concern that “cheapest wasn’t always the best option” and some discussion about how value for money should be taken into account. Again, some respondents wanted additional details and said that the service should be voluntary as that would allow them to continue to use small local suppliers. 9% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The majority of respondents (76%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the Get Help Buying for Schools service would add value to schools’ procurement activity. Respondents again noted that the service would help them save time and money and help to ensure compliance. A number of respondents suggested that the service could concentrate on signposting people to the best deals. 17% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 8% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The majority of respondents (75%) agreed that this service would give schools greater accessibility to procurement support. They suggested that particular support was needed for large or complicated procurements. There were some respondents who said they needed additional details around how the service would work as they did not believe the consultation provided sufficient details. 17% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. 8% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The majority of respondents (70%) agreed that a self-serve digital process on Buying for Schools GOV.UK pages would give schools greater access to procurement support when needed. They felt that speed of access and the ability to access the system at any time were positive points. They did however suggest that it was important that they could actually speak to someone if the need arose. 22% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 9% respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

## Question 9

**To what degree do you agree with the following statement 'The introduction of the chosen in-house delivered model of a new national buying service run by the DFE would have a positive impact on my organisation directly or indirectly'. Please let us know what the impact would be.**

The majority of respondents either agreed 161 (46%) or strongly agreed 48 (14%) that the chosen in house delivered model would have a positive effect on their organisation. 101 (29%) neither agreed nor disagreed, the majority of those suggesting they needed further details. 12 (4%) disagreed and 23 (7%) strongly disagreed. This question was not applicable for 7 (2%) respondents as they were individuals and the question related to an organisation.

Seventy Five (21%) respondents said that a national buying service would help to save them time and money. They said that the tender process was time consuming and as some schools did not have the skills to undertake it, they had to pay for it. Respondents suggested that a national buying service would:

- Reduce workload by taking away the due diligence requirement for new suppliers.
- Ensure that we are using suppliers who have an understanding of school needs.
- Provide access to a service and help manage the inevitable peaks and troughs of procurement in schools.
- Be a valuable resource for small schools where staff have limited time to search for suppliers.
- Support with decision making and ensure good value.
- Help to benchmark existing prices and compare.
- Give confidence about who we are buying from and costs.

Forty four (13%) respondents suggested that they needed more information, the majority of them having chosen neither agree or disagree as their answer. They did not feel they had sufficient detail to answer the question. Respondents noted:

- Without using the service, I can't tell if it would have a positive impact, but I am prepared to use the service for our next procurement procedure.
- Depends on how good it is, how relevant the products are and how responsive and flexible the service is.
- Further details on both the buying routes that will be recommended and the selection criteria for these buying routes need to be provided.
- Hard to comment without seeing the service - range of goods, prices available, ease of use. A number of our school's existing suppliers are very competitive on price and easy to deal with.
- Unsure at this stage - query as to whether 'national' service would not be able to allow for local situations.
- Whether items would be relevant to Special Schools and to PFI schools.

- Depends on which providers are allowed to participate and what the requirements will be.
- I cannot agree or disagree until the service is launched/tested.

Thirty-nine (11%) respondents suggested that it was important to take into account local and small suppliers. They said that some organisations prefer to use local suppliers over national ones, particularly where they are competitive on price. There was concern about whether schools could still use local suppliers if they weren't on a list and also concern about how or if small suppliers could become involved. There was some concern from small schools who used small local suppliers as they did not require large quantities and national suppliers were not always interested. Respondents noted that if the provision was mainly for large scale procurement, smaller schools may not meet the support criteria.

Twenty-eight (8%) respondents suggested the service could potentially provide better value through economies of scale. Some noted that for smaller schools it could help them to access savings which could be achieved through bulk purchasing. Respondents also felt that as all schools purchased similar items, bulk purchasing power could result in significant savings.

Twenty-three (7%) respondents suggested that schools having an awareness of all options was important. It was noted that the impact of the service could be dependent on whether it favoured one particular Public Sector Buying Organisation (PBSO) over another. They believed that provided that DfE treated all PSBOs equally and worked with them to offer the very best frameworks and dynamic purchasing system contracts, then more value could be added to the process than currently existed. It was noted that although being able to access a wide variety of options would be beneficial, it could sometimes be complicated and time consuming for schools.

Twenty-six (6%) respondents said that any system introduced needed to be quick and easy to access and use.

Twenty (6%) respondents said that they could achieve better value themselves and that they already provided this type of service for their schools. They noted that they had a good knowledge of procurement services and were experienced at what they did. Some respondents said that they had used DfE procurement services before and were able to secure better value elsewhere. Some noted that the system would be useful as part of a benchmarking process, but they would still perform their own procurement to ensure best value. One respondent suggested that they currently had expertise that they could utilise with regard to buying, however, should that expertise no longer be available, then they would welcome this service.

Seventeen (5%) respondents suggested that the DfE did not have a very good track record of procurement and that they were not a delivery specialist. A number of respondents cited previous and recent examples where they thought provision had not been good. Respondents suggested that some staff involved had insufficient

knowledge of the frameworks they were advising on and insufficient understanding of the detail to provide the range of expertise required to advise schools.

Thirteen (4%) respondents suggested that this was a duplication of what was already available on the market. They suggested that this functionality may not get used and could quickly become redundant meaning schools would continue to use established frameworks where they already had an existing relationship. Respondents did however suggest that if DfE worked cooperatively with these organisations then there would be benefits.

## Question 10

**In principle, do you or your organisation agree with the introduction of a DfE in-house delivered model of a new national buying service which we believe will help schools secure value for money when buying goods and services?**

The majority of respondents either agreed 195 (55%) or strongly agreed 88 (25%) with the introduction of a DfE in-house delivered model of a new national buying service. 38 (11%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 18 (5%) disagreed and 13 (4%) strongly disagreed.

Twenty-one (6%) respondents believed the service would add confidence to the procurement process. They noted that in these difficult times for school budgets it was important to be able to evidence that they had achieved value for money. Respondents also noted that the service would give confidence to trustees and governors that best practice had been applied when procuring. It was also suggested that the service would be useful in smaller schools where procurement was the role of one employee or simply a part of one role.

Seventeen (5%) respondents suggested that they needed further details:

- Would like to have more details as to what actually can be purchased through this model.
- It is not possible to determine whether a centralised approach is appropriate without understanding the areas of focus and the selection criteria in respect to preferred procurement routes.
- At the moment I must disagree, without understanding more about how we can get on the list of suppliers so we can compete with others on a level playing field.
- The consultation paper does not detail what the current issues are with the current operating model to determine the level of risk and waste on non-staff spend within the sector, therefore I cannot comment if this investment is value for money for the taxpayer.
- The rationale provided in your document does not explain why the current provision is inadequate.

Fifteen (4%) respondents suggested that the cheapest option was not always the best value for money. Respondents noted that some schools felt obliged to go for the cheapest option which wasn't always the best option for students or the school community. They noted that sometimes local was best and the cost differential was very small and that value for money needed to be very clearly defined. One example cited was for school catering where it was suggested that cost should only be 40% of consideration and that quality should be the largest consideration. Respondents also noted that whole life costs needed to be taken into account when considering value for money.

Fifteen (4%) respondents suggested that using the service should be optional or voluntary. Some respondents suggested that they had existing relationships with local suppliers and wanted to retain the option of using them. Respondents also suggested that there were occasions where they had sourced better prices themselves and if the service was compulsory they would be paying more for goods or services than they needed to. It was also noted that the current climate allowed schools to make decisions freely and that making a buying service compulsory would seem like a backward step.

Thirteen (4%) respondents again suggested that it was important to take into account local and small suppliers suggesting that they did not want them excluded from the frameworks. Some respondents noted that local suppliers would often have a smaller carbon footprint than national suppliers and that buying from local suppliers could be beneficial to their local economy. One respondent noted they had academies across Devon and Cornwall and with their particular economic climate, to help local businesses was important to them.

## Question 11

### **To what extent do you agree our Get Help Buying for Schools service would add value to schools' procurement activity?**

The majority of respondents either agreed 192 (55%) or strongly agreed 73 (21%) that the Get Help Buying for Schools service would add value to schools' procurement activity. 61 (17%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 16 (5%) disagreed and 10 (3%) strongly disagreed.

Thirty-one (9%) respondents again noted that they felt the service would help save them time and money. They noted that:

- It should save the school time spent in sourcing different quotes.
- It will save time and allow the school to use buying experts with more knowledge.
- Procurement is time consuming and costly, this would certainly add value in management of both of those resources and ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

- Save administrative time, reach out to more suppliers, get best value for money.
- By having a national service schools should be able to make best use of their time, in the knowledge that they are getting the best value for money, without the need for searching and negotiation at the local level. However, this benefit will only be realised if the process and access to the service is simple, unified and well managed.
- National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) believes that such a service would add value to schools' procurement activity. Many schools do not have the capacity and/or specific expertise in all areas of procurement. Whilst support is available from other sources it can be limited and/or costly.

Twenty-seven (8%) respondents said they needed more details. They again noted that they did not think there was sufficient detail in the consultation for them to form an opinion or they would need to use the system before they could decide how useful it would be:

- Cannot make a judgement until I have used it.
- It would depend on what the service provided, and whether it could be personalised to local context.
- Too little information at the present is available to ascertain the value of this service to schools.
- I would have to see the service levels and KPIs before I can comment on this.

Sixteen (5%) respondents suggested that it was important that people were signposted to better value. They noted that the focus of the service should be on signposting schools to appropriate procurement solutions. Respondents also said that some procurements were very specialised, such as energy, and that for complex procurements such as these they should be signposted to expert advice. They also suggested that where they believed the service could add value was in raising the profile and understanding of procurement and the benefits it can deliver and highlighting the help that was available from PSBOs.

Thirteen (4%) respondents suggested that the service would help ensure compliance noting that:

- It would bring an unbiased approach and would give the schools confidence that all procurement regulations had been complied with.
- It would provide a compliant route to market.
- It adds the expertise and the impartiality to ensure that the procurement is fair and value for money.

## Question 12

### **To what extent do you agree that this service would enable schools greater access to procurement support?**

The majority of respondents either agreed 188 (53%) or strongly agreed 80 (23%) that the Get Help Buying for Schools service would enable schools greater access to procurement support. 59 (17%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 13 (4%) disagreed and 12 (3%) strongly disagreed.

Twenty-three (7%) respondents said they needed further details as they did not believe the consultation provided sufficient information. Respondents asked what was the cost? How does the service work? Is there any risk? What would the levels of service be? Would local suppliers be included? If yes, how easy was it for local firms to sign up? and what capacity was there in the system? They also asked:

- Would it cover services such as energy & water?
- With schools signposted to digital products first, how are these products and suppliers identified?

Thirteen (4%) respondents believed they should have access to all available procurement options. They noted that:

- It suggests I will have more choice/options.
- Often, a school will not know about alternative routes to market such as different consortia or buying groups and these should be fairly and equally represented allowing improved informed choice.
- I think that the offering though should share all organisations and support available to schools and not be biased to selected organisations.
- The ability for schools to access a single location could help schools save time and resources by offering the ability to access the best deals available for the sector.

Thirteen (4%) respondents suggested that particular support was needed for large contracts or purchases. They said that although engagement with professionals was expensive it was currently necessary for high value contracts. Respondents again noted that contracts such as catering and energy need expert help and that even some schools with well-defined procurement processes would benefit from additional support. Respondents said:

- For catering services procurement, you need a specialist commercial cell which includes catering experts. This team will be the go-to team to help schools understand the nuances of catering accounting and trading.
- For big ticket items such as energy, photocopying contracts and IT procurement possibly, but this would complement, not replace, the school expert who knows the school context.
- The loss of the borough procurement service has made life more tricky, especially when tendering for big items, such as lunch service.

## Question 13

**To what extent do you agree that a self-serve digital process on Buying For Schools GOV.UK pages will enable schools greater access to procurement support when needed?**

The majority of respondents either agreed 175 (50%) or strongly agreed 69 (20%) that a self-serve digital process on Buying for Schools GOV.UK pages will enable schools greater access to procurement support when needed. 76 (22%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 21 (6%) disagreed and 11 (3%) strongly disagreed.

Thirty-two (9%) respondents said that it was important that there was an option to speak to someone if they needed support or guidance. They suggested that some of the current government frameworks were difficult to navigate and that it was helpful to have a person to help and this should be replicated for a self-serve digital process. There was some concern that online or email help functions would not provide a satisfactory or quick enough answer. Respondents said:

- An easy-to-use self-serve digital service will offer accessibility provided it is well supported. It would be helpful to incorporate a series of FAQs, as is the case with the Covid testing pages.
- Provided it is easy to find and navigate this will be really useful. Having experts on hand to support will also be key to ensure that navigation in the first instance is productive.
- Online access is definitely the way forward, however, people power is important - could the system have a live chat or second line support if there are questions.
- Not sure that having a completely digital experience works. It would be ok if there was access to a real person if assistance was needed.
- My only reservation would be that there can be unique scenarios and questions etc, that do not fall comfortably into a self-service digital environment and so to avoid frustration and disengagement the option to speak to a human will be important!
- Obviously a digital service has its place. If it only operates on a self-help basis though, it will not deliver what many schools need.
- The pandemic has demonstrated how valuable e-solutions can be, however, as recognised by the DfE, procurement can be complex for schools and as such there is still a place for more traditional local engagement i.e. face to face, telephone support which is currently in place in some LA regions.

Twenty-two (6%) respondents suggested an advantage of the system was speed of access to resources and the ability to access resources during non-traditional working hours. They suggested that if the digital solution worked then it could be much more efficient. Respondents noted:

- I have used CPC online procurement services in the past. Found the online service to be quick and easily accessible.

- It would be accessible 24 hours per day/365 days per annum rather than just during immediate business hours. Also as a web service it can be used regardless as to whether at home or school.
- A self-serve digital process could potentially be a good idea for some frameworks, where all fees and potential hidden fees should be made transparent.
- It will be easy to navigate rather than making lots of telephone calls.
- Ease of accessibility is the most important factor.

## Question 14

### **Do you have any suggestions for our new service regarding elements of procurement support that would be especially valuable for your organisation?**

Thirty-six (10%) respondents suggested that help with specifications would be particularly useful. They said that help with tendering in general may be needed but that the provision of template tender documents and scoring matrices would be particularly useful. Respondents suggested including the following:

- Tender process and example documentation for large contracts such as reprographics, telephony, catering, cleaning, etc.
- Assistance with specifications for tendering and scoring matrices.
- Provide template tender documents for schools/trust to work from.
- A checking service of contracts when decided by school to ensure no 'nasties' in the small print with the emphasis that control and final decisions remain with the school.
- List of key questions to ask suppliers to ensure the correct product is purchased. Things to avoid too.

Fourteen (4%) respondents again suggested that there needed to be access to a wide range of suppliers. They noted that unless there was access to the whole market place and not just those frameworks approved by DfE then the service would lose its attraction. It was noted that although respondents tried their best to get value for money for their schools they were not always convinced that they were searching a sufficiently wide field.

The responses covered most of the areas where schools could be expected to buy and this could possibly be explained by the different level of procurement experience of individual respondents. Respondents suggested they needed expert help for goods or services where there was a high value or those where procurement only took place every five years, for example. Respondents noted that they would benefit from:

- Utility support would be appreciated - this is currently unregulated and it is hard to read between the sales pitch to work out if you are getting a good deal.

- Support with reviewing high value contracts, such as catering, given the increasing complexity that occurs in higher value contracts was needed.
- Really strong utilities frameworks with specialist support to allow us to come away from using brokers.
- Support with technical areas such as CCTV, access control and Building Management systems.

Respondents also suggested that frameworks needed to be regularly reviewed, particularly for areas where there were rapid and constant price changes.

## Question 15

### **Do you have any comments on the chosen design and operation of the new service?**

There were no new issues that emerged in question 15. Respondents did however reiterate a number of issues from previous questions.

Respondents again suggested that the service would duplicate what was already on the market. They said it was simply a duplication of frameworks that had already been created and they did not think it would add any value. A number of respondents noted that as CCS already existed that this was not good use of taxpayers money. It was suggested that enhancing CCS's services would be the most cost effective way forward. It was also suggested that introducing the service could have a negative effect in general as there would be more competition for skilled labour and that PSBOs may try to maintain market share by using funds that would normally have been invested back into the school marketplace.

Respondents again noted that the service should be easy to access and use, suggesting that we should "make it clear, simple and make sure it works". They also suggested that it should be in one place and not have multiple log-ins.

Respondents also noted again that they wanted someone to speak to in case of difficulties and that the DfE should consider Team / Zoom meetings as an option where clarification was needed. It was suggested that a lot of email communication could be open to misinterpretation, and face to face meetings, even online would be preferable.

## Government Response

The Department for Education has carefully considered the responses to the consultation and has noted the views of schools, multi academy trusts, local authorities, service providers and other stakeholders in the sector. Responses gathered from the consultation will inform the ongoing development of the service. The main themes are addressed in our response below.

Despite the services already available to schools, user research has shown that many schools have problems achieving best value from their contracts for complex goods or services, and they have neither the time or specialist knowledge required to deliver best value for money or commercial compliance. These are services that can be high cost and risk to schools, such as cleaning, catering, energy and utilities, insurance, buildings and furniture, professional services and a range of ICT needs. Use of the service will not be mandatory, we want schools to have choice. Our aim is to work with existing providers, be they local authority, third or private sector, with a focus on securing the best value for schools on complex procurement.

Get Help Buying for Schools will be launched as a free and voluntary service provided by DfE and dedicated to buying for schools, unlike any alternative services available today. The service will recommend existing products and services to schools where DfE are assured that those products and services are offering best value commercial solutions. We will also seek opportunities for schools to save money through collective buying. There was a theme in the consultation feedback around 'value' to schools being about more than just cost. The department recognises that ease of use, compliance, ethical considerations, and customer service are also key factors, and will work with suppliers to ensure that value is at the heart of the services that we recommend.

Get Help Buying for Schools will provide a range of support to schools, from online guidance and tools, to hands on-support. The service will have a dedicated procurement operations team. This will be staffed with Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) qualified commercial specialists who have a deep understanding of public sector procurement, as well as detailed understanding of the procurement challenges faced by schools. We will seek to develop the support we provide as we grow the service, based on feedback from schools.

Our procurement process and our approach to the identification of recommended commercial solutions will be in line with wider government procurement strategy in terms of considering the social value expectations of individual schools, such as working with SMEs, local and ethical suppliers and other social value and environmental obligations.

We understand from schools that to gain maximum benefit from Get Help Buying for Schools, any digital components of the service must be intuitive to use. We continue to ensure that all digital tools are thoroughly user tested by school business professionals and development is guided by user need.

Some school business professionals report they would benefit from additional support to build confidence around complex procurement. In response, the department will expand the opportunities currently provided to school buyers to attend information sessions that explain the details of individual deals and frameworks recommended by DfE. We will also provide sessions on best practice in procurement for schools and how to get the most out of the tools and services available to them.

We will expand our existing stakeholder engagement team who will work regionally to support schools and local authorities across England, to ensure that they are able to engage effectively with the service. We also aim to recruit school business professional advocates who are working in schools across the country to support the introduction of the service and provide peer support to schools in their area.

Ahead of the service launching in the Autumn we will expand the range of products and services already available through the [find a framework tool](#), and continue to evolve the range of the services recommended based on feedback from schools. We plan to grow the service slowly over time and always place providing best value for schools at the heart of what we do.

## Next steps

After careful consideration of all the feedback from this consultation, we have decided to proceed with the proposed in-house model for Get Help Buying for Schools. We will continue to engage with schools, local authorities, suppliers and other stakeholders in the sector to shape, pilot and test our service. We will release more details about the service and how to access it ahead of the launch in Autumn 2021.



Department  
for Education

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