



Department
for Education

Schools buying programme 2020

Prospectus 2020-2025

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Foreword

In 2017 the Department for Education (DfE) launched the *schools' buying strategy*. Its intention was to formalise a series of initiatives to support buyers in schools to get best value, save time and ultimately invest those savings back into the front line, for the benefit of pupils.

Since 2018 we have witnessed schools make considerable progress, securing estimated savings of over £425m as of April 2020.

The Regional School Buying Hubs pilots supported over 1600 schools in two regions with complex procurement, saving £11.6m in just over two years. We know schools welcome specialist help with their buying. In response, the department will be launching a new service, Get Help Buying for Schools from this autumn. The service will provide schools with a range of tools, as well as practical hands-on support with their complex procurement. We will also continue to improve the range and quality of products and services that are recommended for schools. Recent additions include new furniture and catering frameworks.

The department will continue to enhance the service offered by the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA), our alternative to commercial insurance, ensuring schools have peace of mind and receive timely and professional support when they need it most. In 2021, we will be focusing on how we can work in partnership to take forward a programme of proactive resilience measures.

There are over 100 SBP networks across England, providing invaluable peer support to SBPs. We will continue to work with them and others across the sector to meet the changing needs of schools.

We have listened and learned a lot from school leaders, Schools Business Professionals, professional associations and other stakeholders who continue to provide valuable feedback and support.

We are now looking forward to the next five years, continuing our work together.

Baroness Berridge

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for School System

Schools buying programme 2020: summary

In 2017 the Department for Education (DfE) launched the ‘schools’ buying strategy’ (SBS) to support schools to save time and money on their non-staff spend. We aimed to help all schools improve how they buy goods and services – allowing them to maximise the resources they can invest in high-quality education for their pupils. As the department strives to provide a world class education system, this strategy builds on and develops these initial ambitions and sets out the department’s approach for the next five years to help schools achieve best value from their non-staff expenditure.

Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed before April 2022.

Who is this for?

This guidance is for:

- All financial and administration staff in schools including school business managers (SBMs), bursars and those in schools with finance or procurement responsibilities. We collectively define these as School Business Professionals (SBP)
- Headteachers and other school leaders
- Academy trust and school governing boards.

A successful introduction

We are proud of what we have achieved since the launch of the ‘schools’ buying strategy’ three years ago. Since 2017, our efforts have helped schools save over an estimated £425m as of April 2020.

We have introduced:

- Better collaboration with and between SBP networks
- Regional School Buying hubs, piloted in the North West and South West regions
- A new school supply staff framework alongside other new better buying deals
- Improved digital platforms including [Find a Framework](#)
- An extension to the Risk Protection Arrangement to all local authority-maintained schools.

These successes are of course thanks to the continued efforts of schools and their SBPs, working alongside the department to achieve financial savings across their non-staff expenditure.

Buying challenges continue

Whilst a lot has been achieved, the challenges schools face that were set out in the original strategy are still relevant today. We know that:

- Saving money on non-staff expenditure can allow schools to invest in teaching and learning and lead to improved outcomes for children and young people.
- Schools can benefit from specialist support to make the best use of resources – ensuring every pound is used efficiently to improve standards and have maximum impact for their pupils.
- Schools do not typically have specialist procurement skills available in-house. This can make efficiency savings to help manage these ongoing financial pressures, while continuing to improve standards for their pupils, difficult for schools.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has had, and will continue to have, an impact on school expenditure making the case for efficiency even more valid.

Evolution of the strategy

Last year, the Department for Education's Schools Commercial Team (SCT) reviewed the progress made against the delivery of the 2017 '*schools' buying strategy*', helping us to learn lessons from delivery over the last 3 years, both in terms of what works with the sector and what does not.

Over the last 12 months, we have worked with a range of stakeholders across the department and in the wider schools' environment to review the effectiveness of all our interventions. We have taken on board our experiences and learning since 2017 to update our strategy and approach, and continue to evaluate our efforts to ensure they are focused in the best way to support schools.

A user-centred approach

An ambition of the '*schools' buying strategy*' was to bring schools and the department closer together. In some areas, collaboration has increased considerably since 2017. We have established new working groups including the: MAT procurement professionals, network leaders forum and a user group providing regular feedback to buying related initiatives we are developing. With it has come better understanding, positive challenge and joint working. This collaborative way of working remains a core part of our strategy for the next 5 years.

The 4C's: cost, compliance, convenience and commissioning

Our evaluation demonstrated that our interventions have provided best value support for schools where they meet three C's:

- Cost – offering an excellent value for money option for schools
- Compliance – providing a clearly compliant offer for schools that meets all requirements and regulations that schools need to meet; and
- Convenience – the offer must be easy to understand, access and implement for schools.

All three need to exist for schools to achieve best value. To ensure all our future initiatives meet these three C's we have introduced a fourth C to our internal process – Commissioning.

Commissioning is a process we will use to ensure a consistent methodology for assessing the need and potential success of proposals to ensure they are user centred, evidence based and consider the user journey from end to end. Implementing the Commissioning model in this updated strategy will help ensure we deliver evidence based solutions that best meet schools' needs.

Activities that have proved successful like enhanced digital capability will continue, our successful Regional Schools Buying Hubs pilots will be evolved to become a national

buying service and the new user driven agile focus alongside a holistic commissioning model will deliver future initiatives that will:

- Be based on user need
- Be data driven
- Deliver end-to-end solutions
- Have robust evaluation and be agile
- Be piloted where possible
- Not expect schools to be procurement experts
- Save schools time and money and be easy for schools to access
- Include behavioural insights
- Have a single route into all services.

These commitments are encapsulated within the three core strategic aims of our programme:

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Support schools to be smart consumers – providing practical help and advice on buying decisions and contract management



Ensure buyers and decision makers in schools have the right relationships and skills – building peer-to-peer support networks and creating regional advice and guidance services to help with complex buying



Ensure buyers have access to the best value every time – giving schools access to better deals.

In our evolved strategy, we want to build on the successes and lessons we have learnt and feedback we have received over the last three years. Our refined approach and aims, and our planned future initiatives are designed to deliver outcomes which will better meet the emerging needs of the sector.

Buying initiatives

Delivering on commitments

During the implementation of the 2017 '*schools' buying strategy*', we delivered a wide range of tools and support available to schools as part of the [Buying for Schools collection on GOV.UK](#). Our content has been improved and re-developed to simplify and increase usability. This includes:

- Over 30 national approved DfE frameworks available via our Find a Framework service
- Access to useful guidance and support materials
- Find an SBP network near you or information and guidance to set up your own.

Taking stock of the 2017 '*schools' buying strategy*' allowed lessons to be learned from delivery over the last 3 years, confirming current and future schools buying needs and identified activities we can undertake to improve the Buying for Schools offer to meet the needs of schools. In addition to the tools, guidance and support the department already provides for schools, there is more we can do.

Over the next five years the programme will build and develop on those original ambitions set in 2017; developing the successful elements and adapting our approaches in other areas to ultimately help improve educational outcomes.

Smarter buying

In procuring a wide range of goods and services in often complex marketplaces, we know schools can face higher costs than they need to, spending money which could be better spent on providing high quality teaching and achieving better educational outcomes for their pupils. We want to continue to help schools overcome these procurement challenges and we will strive to do so across the following areas:

Accessible and simple advice and guidance

With a disparate market and lots of suppliers and products on offer, it is often a challenge to know what product to buy and when to purchase. We will help schools to access the right products which meet their needs, and to reduce demand for the products that they do not. We will continue the "no waste nudges" and "always or never buys" envisaged by the 2017 strategy but will go further in providing information on buying best practice, "how to" guides and case studies.

Be led by the operating environment

We want to ensure that all products and services we develop are considered end-to-end and appropriately contextualised so they are fit for purpose for our end user. As

previously referenced, the underpinning approach will be a commissioning model based on data, market and user research and this will form the basis for all the products and services we develop. Our strategies will interact with the operational delivery of the school, looking at demand, specifications, the market and commercial considerations. Through adopting this approach, we will be able to deliver products and services which are user focused and tailored to the evolving needs of the sector.

Relationships and skills

Schools and the buyers within them have varying ranges of experience in conducting procurements. We want to continue to support those who have direct responsibility for commercial efficiency in schools and learn from the experiences of those in the profession so we can ensure the support we deliver is fit for purpose. Therefore, to achieve this we will support schools and the buyers within them with the following:

Networks

We will continue to support the development of SBP networks and encourage them to share good practice. Similarly, the addition of insight groups, network leaders group, and other procurement groups developed over the last 3 years have proved successful. We want to strengthen these groups by giving them the support they need to continue to grow, expanding their reach across the sector to help more schools and the buyers make smart consumer choices. Our work with the networks will also ensure we continue to gain rich and relevant insights into the realities for SBPs, helping us shape current and future services.

Engaging communications

Buyers in schools receive a high volume of buying related correspondence from across the sector. We will endeavour to better coordinate and communicate how we will help schools with their complex procurements. This will also continue to enhance the department's relationship with school buyers and decision makers.

Easy access to the best value

The current market has lots of suppliers as well as bodies such as Public Sector Buying Organisations (PSBOs), procurement consultancies, and Local Authority Traded Services. We want schools to know where to look by cutting out some of the complexity, providing greater transparency, and introducing tools and advice that signpost buyers directly to the right place.

The initiatives below set out our ambitions for helping schools achieve savings on their non-staff spend:

Get Help Buying for Schools service

The Regional Schools Buying Hubs pilot has shown a need and demand for a national provision. In the year ahead the coverage will be expanded nationally through a new national service – ‘Get Help Buying for Schools’. This service will provide general advice and guidance, aggregation opportunities and in some instances will undertake complex procurement on behalf of schools. The service will be accessible online through GOV.UK where schools and the buyers within them can access online guidance and support in creating a procurement specification. Users can also access further support from procurement specialists when needed, who can offer further advice and guidance as well as conducting some procurements on behalf of the school from source to contract award.

Digital tools

Building on the success of tools such as Find a Framework and the websites for our pilot Hubs, we will continue to make better use of digital opportunities to access the marketplace, saving schools time and money.

Approved deals

With a disparate market and lots of suppliers and products on offer, it is often a challenge for SBPs and decision makers to know what product to buy and when to purchase products and services. We will help schools access the right products which meet their needs by pointing them towards recommended deals that offer value for money.

Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA)

The Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) is a service developed by the department as an alternative to commercial insurance, initially for academies on its launch in 2014. As part of our refreshed strategy, on 1 April 2020 it was extended to local authority maintained schools (LAMS). It is now available to all public sector schools on a voluntary, opt-in basis and membership has steadily increased.

We are continuing to enhance the RPA service and are exploring opportunities to improve our offer to meet the evolving needs of our schools and academies. As part of our commitment to enhance the service in 2021 we will undertake a pilot in offering cyber cover and protection support to some RPA schools.

Flood resilient schools

We are working in partnership with the Environment Agency to deliver flood resilience measures for schools and academies at risk of flooding. This new service aims to reduce the risk of damage to schools and academies as a result of flooding and loss of days in education for pupils.

Other Schools Resource Management (SRM) services

The Schools Buying Programme is a key pillar of the Government's School Resource Management (SRM) portfolio. The SRM Portfolio draws together activity aimed at securing efficiency and long-term value from schools' spending, making every pound count. It provides a suite of tools, practical support and guidance for schools and academies to help reduce costs on regular purchases and recruitment, improve their access to financial information and give SBPs the support that they need to manage their costs effectively and maximise the value of their spending, for the benefit of pupils. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Guidance, tools and training to help schools get the most from their workforce spending, including through [integrated curriculum and financial planning \(ICFP\)](#);
- [Teaching Vacancies](#), a job-listing service where schools can post teaching vacancies for free, enabling large savings on recruitment;
- Advice and tools to help school leaders, governors and academy trustees to understand their data and use it to make informed decisions on how to manage resources efficiently;
- Support for schools to get the most from their digital technology through the [Get Help With Technology programme](#); and
- School Resource Management Advisers (SRMAs) – sector experts who work with schools and trusts, helping to make the best use of available resources, to deliver the best possible education for pupils.

You can access further information and tools for Schools Resource Management at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/schools-financial-health-and-efficiency>

Good Estate Management for Schools (GEMS)

Good estates management for schools (GEMS) provides guidance, tools and resources to help schools and responsible bodies manage their estates well and ensure they provide a safe, functional and comfortable learning environment.

Managing your estate effectively can help you save money, run safer schools and be more efficient.

GEMS includes information on a range of topics including strategic estate management, maintenance and health and safety, as well as a [self-assessment tool](#) to help generate an action plan.

You can find out more at: [Good estate management for schools - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



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