Guidance

How to apply to set up a maths school for 16 to 19 year olds

Updated 26 July 2021

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What is a maths school?

Maths schools are free schools for 16 to 19 year pupils who have a great aptitude for maths. As part of the government's industrial strategy, maths schools help to address shortages of highly skilled graduates in sectors that depend on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) skills.

The aim of maths schools is to prepare the most mathematically able pupils to succeed in university and employment, including highly selective maths university and physical sciences degrees.

Maths schools can also be centres of excellence in raising attainment, supporting and challenging other maths teachers and providing outreach to students who cannot fulfil their associated potential without attending a specialist maths school.

The 3 established maths schools, King's College London Mathematics School and Exeter Mathematics School demonstrate that the model can be very successful. Both are rated outstanding by Ofsted and already among the highest performing school sixth forms in the country. King's College London Mathematics School was ranked 1st in the 2019 progress tables. Once the transition to full cohorts is complete, they will be ranked in their institutions across a number of local schools, which benefit much larger numbers of pupils.

Funding for maths schools

Maths schools will receive £250,000 each in additional funding every year, on top of their post-16 funding formula allocation. The funding is to support the maths school specific aims of:

- providing a stretching education that is developed in collaboration with leading mathematics universities, with a greater focus on wider mathematical problem solving and pure mathematics than other able 16 to 19 year pupils, to ensure mathematics
- bringing together top performing mathematics pupils into a small school environment to maximise their potential and university progression
- providing learning and teaching collaboration or wider leadership through delivering significant outreach that could benefit the rest of the system and influence teaching and learning in other schools, including those that are in the sixth form and universities' widening participation commitments

A maths hub is a network for the leadership of mathematics improvement work across a region. Maths hubs are led by teaching schools and include at least one hub lead from a school, higher education institutions and other bodies or individuals with mathematics education expertise.

How to open a new maths school

Once your universities or partner organisations have agreed that they are interested in opening a maths school, you will need to follow this application process.

1. Check eligibility
2. Find out more before expressing an interest
3. Discussion with the Department for Education (DfE) (optional at this stage)
4. Submit a maths school expression of interest
5. Meet with DfE
6. Develop and submit a business case
7. Secretary of State decision on whether proposal enters the pre-opening phase

At any stage partners in the university sector can decide to support the maths school in a different way and withdraw.

Eligibility

We would like to work with the most selective mathematics universities where the mathematics department is ranked in the top 10 universities in the Times Higher 2021 QS rankings (usually equivalent to 8th in the wider world ranking). However, in cases where actual/half-finals below this, we will consider where the other strengths of the university and proposal. Applicants who are under the tariff should contact us to discuss.

Individual colleges, schools, and multi-academy trusts (MATs) interested in working with a maths school, or opening a maths school can express an interest if they meet the quality criteria set out in annex A.

Find out more before expressing an interest

Before submitting an expression of interest, then you may want to contact us first and find out more about what is involved.

The expression of interest requires the university or partner organisation to confirm it meets the quality criteria set out in annex A and then to submit a maximum of 2 paragraphs that:

- explain your motivation for opening a maths school
- provide the names of the individuals in your organisation(s) who would be involved in developing and then operating and governing the maths school, experience and proposed time commitments for doing so

Submit a maths school expression of interest

Once you have all the information you require your university or partner organisation should submit a maths school expression of interest form.

Meet with DfE

After submitting an expression of interest, and securing a university partner, we'll invite you to discuss your vision for the maths school and your capacity and capability to deliver it.

At the meeting, we'll clarify our expectations for developing a business case and we'll discuss your proposal in more detail. We'll also discuss your proposed timeline for developing a maths school to be ready and decide not to proceed.

Develop and submit a business case

If you decide to proceed following your initial meeting with us, you will need to develop a business case. We anticipate that it will take up to 6 months to develop a business case.

There will be regular iterative discussions and meetings as the business case develops between the maths school, DfE and the university sponsor that demonstrate we are making sufficient progress in the 6 month timeframe.

There will be no formal interview stage.

At any time during the iterative development of the business case, the university or partner organisation may decide to support the school system in a different way and withdraw.

The business case must meet the maths school specific criteria set out in annex A and also should set out how plans for meet each criterion.

We will offer advice and support on expectations and highlight good practice.

Annex B provides a guide to what the business case should include. Our expectations include establishing an academy trust and be aware of other matters which are set out in annex B.

Outreach

The main aim of maths schools is to prepare more of our most mathematically able pupils to succeed in mathematics related disciplines at top universities and employment. Maths schools will also be centres of excellence in raising attainment and supporting with both the pupils in the maths school and pupils and teachers in other schools and colleges to increase mathematics participation, teaching and attainment and widen participation.

Significant outreach work, over and above what you would normally expect of a school sixth form, should underpin the maths school application and should include the universities' widening participation commitments.

As part of the business case, you'll need to set out your plans for outreach as per the specific business case criterion. You can determine what outreach would have the most impact in your local area and what you would expect to be part of your outreach activity in the following areas in accordance:

- **run outreach programme activities** (complementing the work of maths hubs) to ensure that students who are able to benefit from a maths school are encouraged to apply, including outreach to girls, financially disadvantaged, black and Asian, and those lacking and structured activities, and individual feedback
- **support teacher subject knowledge and development** for teachers of mathematics in partner and feeder schools
- **ignite the interest of potential pupils** in the mathematics curriculum that will be offered by the school and prepare pupils for the study of advanced mathematics

Decision

The Secretary of State for Education will only make a decision on whether a maths school can proceed into the pre-opening phase when:

- a final business case has been received
- the requirements in annex A have been met
- the business case is deemed sound

If the business case is deemed sound, we will give approval to progress your project towards opening, rather than being given the approval to open a new maths school.

The decision is final and there is no appeals process.

Approval of your business case does not mean approval of every detail, such as your preferred principal designation or curriculum offer. Approval may be conditional on amending certain aspects and is also conditional on the capital costs representing good value for money.

Pre-opening phase

The pre-opening phase is the time after a maths school business case has been approved and before it becomes open, during which time the detailed plans for the school will need to be developed and delivered. We'll provide support throughout this process.

When progressing the pre-opening phase, maths schools will need to adhere to the Department for Education's (DfE) pre-opening guidance and be subject to the Secretary of State's approval letter. Further conditions may also be set out in the approval letter. The approval letter will also set out the date by which the school must open, and a specific role to be addressed the proposal to proceed successfully.

Failure to meet any of these conditions means it is unlikely that the Secretary of State will be able to enter into a funding agreement with you. The funding agreement is a legally binding document that sets out the rights and responsibilities of the academy trust and the terms and conditions on which the maths school is funded, and what is expected by both the trust and DfE.

We anticipate that in the pre-opening phase will be to agree your provisional opening date. This will be agreed between us, and the university and its partners. A number of factors will be taken into account when we agree the provisional opening date, including the permanent site for the school. We will agree the provisional opening date with the permanent site in confirmed, and once we have assessed the time needed to deliver the school's permanent site and the impact on the school's pupils and staff.

It is vital that we work with applicants and Local DfE (or government office) property company, responsible for buying and developing sites in England to conduct a site search and secure a site for the school. We will need to agree with the trust the terms and conditions on which the maths school is funded, and what is expected by both the trust and DfE.

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The final decision to open a maths school depends on the Secretary of State for Education's approval. Ministers will take into account the advice of the Regional Schoolroom Trust. The Secretary of State for Education will sign a funding agreement only if he is satisfied that the trust has made sufficient progress to deliver a good standard of education and will be able to meet its financial commitments.

Where a project fails to make sufficient progress in pre-opening, a funding agreement cannot be signed and the opening of the school may be delayed or cancelled.

Contact us

If you want to find out more about the maths school application process and requirements, contact us by email at maths.schools@education.gov.uk.

Annex A: Criteria for maths schools

Registration of interest: quality criteria

We welcome registrations of interest to establish maths schools from universities and diverse relevant partner organisations that meet the following quality criteria:

Universities
The top 10 in the Times Higher QS tariff for the first degree entrants in mathematics or science subject and at least 150 points (on the current tariff) or equivalent, broadly equivalent to 8th.

In exceptional cases, where the actual/half-finals below 150, assessment from DfE that the strengths of the university outweigh this is needed.

Mainstream schools
The existing school has a good or outstanding judgement from Ofsted.

Achievement in your school is above local and national averages (looking at headline accountability measures of attainment and progress) and should generally be a consistent or upward trajectory since the last Ofsted inspection.

FE colleges or sixth form colleges
FE college or sixth form has a good or outstanding judgement from Ofsted.

Achievement is above local and national averages (looking at headline accountability measures of attainment and progress) and should generally be a consistent or upward trajectory since the last Ofsted inspection.

Multi-academy trusts (MATs)
Where there is an existing MAT, we expect it to have a strong track record:

- it has shown improvement
- it has a good or outstanding Ofsted
- is operating efficiently
- has a strong educational track record

We will look at public information and data we already hold about the trust to evaluate this.

Business case criteria

The business case should set out the key features and ethos of the school as well as its curriculum offer, including the proposed admission of 16 pupils. It needs to cover how the proposed maths school would meet the following criteria.

Strong university engagement

The business case must demonstrate long term commitment to the maths school over and above investment in its governance.

Applicants must submit a letter of support for the maths school signed by the vice-chancellor or equivalent senior leadership team member of the university, confirmation of understanding with the academy trust setting out the university's commitment in terms of its day-to-day involvement in running the school.

Prior to signing the funding agreement for the maths school, the university will need to provide a letter of support from the chair of governors of the academy trust setting out:

- providing curriculum support both through the development of existing curriculum models and through more mathematically project-led or research-based approaches to ensure the school remains at the forefront of current thinking
- providing teaching support, including access to lectures, staff as lecturers, PhD students (in a mentoring capacity) and facilities
- using its expertise in, and leading for, widening participation to support and evaluate the impact of the school's outreach work
- providing careers advice on access to HE and alternative options
- providing links to networks of previous and existing students

Governance

The business case must provide initial governance plans which demonstrate understanding and expertise of good governance.

Governance plans must reassure us that the university will be committed to and accountable for the school in the long term (with terms into the university's own governance arrangements at a senior level.

Our strong preference is for the university to be a corporate member of the trust. Universities will be expected to demonstrate that they do not receive financial ongoing commitment in every case, so applicants will need to convince us that their proposed governance arrangements will deliver that.

Qualifications, curriculum and ethosh

The business case should set out:

- the curriculum the school will follow (including the proportion of time spent teaching each subject)
- specialisms which will be offered
- how the school will support learning
- how the approach will help mathematical thinking
- the proposed staffing structure

Maths sixth schools must study mathematics, further mathematics and, for schools approved from 2021 onwards, physics A level (compulsory). Beyond evidence in support of this, we would also expect to see evidence of how the proposed curriculum offer will provide with stretching, challenging and well-rounded post-16 study programmes, projects and excellent(ly) preparation for them to excel in mathematics and related disciplines at top universities.

Improving social mobility, particularly through wider outreach and partnership with feeder schools

A strong business case will be underpinned by a demonstration of knowledge of the local area, including where there is poor provision or areas of deprivation. This should be used to inform the school's outreach programme and how it will ensure its pupils and partners place which demonstrate how it will:

- work with its local community and existing schools in the area
- attract pupils, especially those from disadvantaged or under-represented groups
- support increased attainment and participation in maths more generally in the local area

A key aspect of the maths school model is the outreach work they do with schools in their local area. Outreach work should be a key part of the school's offer and be relevant to any previous engagements you have had with your university partner. Outreach work should be based on the needs of the local area and should include how the work of regional maths hubs to improve mathematics teaching and outcomes is taken into account. Outreach work should include activities that will ignite the interest of young people in mathematics and encourage them to study more mathematics at ages 14 and 16 so that they are in mathematically and mathematics related GCSEs, have aspirations to study further and develop a passion for the subject.

The business case must also set out how the school will support disadvantaged pupils and those from black and Asian backgrounds, including how it will use its outreach work to close the attainment gap in mathematics between disadvantaged backgrounds and everyone else at all key stages but with a particular focus on key stages 3 and 4.

Capacity and capability: Governance and people with the skills, resources and commitment to set up a maths school
Applicants should set out and plan person with at least 7 years' recent experience of each of the following:

- organisational leadership
- setting up new organisations and successfully delivering through partnership working
- being a headteacher of secondary or post-16 level (good or better at last Ofsted)
- leading teaching and learning in a secondary school
- secondary school or post-16 finance expertise to develop financial plans
- school or FE governance expertise

Admissions policy and plans for identifying and selecting pupils
Admissions policy should be based on the proposed admission criteria and results that the year aim to:

- attract pupils with the aptitude pupils with the potential to thrive in a maths school environment
- address social mobility through supporting more disadvantaged pupils and girls into STEM subjects

Information on pupils first and year-on-year intake will should be provided. Applicants should set out how they will:

- recruit pupils
- identify where pupils will come from (demonstrating an understanding of the area and how it will reach out to its potential pupil population)
- market their school to ensure places are full
- articulate what the university's specific role will be

Annex B: Before you submit a business case

Before you submit your business case to the Department for Education (DfE) you need to:

- establish an academy trust as a charitable company limited by guarantee
- be aware of the requirements for academy trusts in relation to school improvement and continuation, advance equality of opportunity and develop good relations between communities
- be able to provide evidence that you have considered these responsibilities in your business case

More information on each of these requirements and other matters you need to be aware of prior to submitting a business case is set out in this section. There is information about how we use your data in annex C.

Establish an academy trust

Each free school is run by an academy trust formed specifically to establish and run one or more schools. This is independent under the Academies Act 2010.

The academy trust will have responsibility for the maths school and will submit the business case.

Academies are independent charitable companies limited by guarantee, with which the Secretary of State has decided to enter into a funding agreement.

If you are intending to open a business case you will need to establish an academy trust using the model articles of association. Information on how to set up a company is available from Companies House.

If you are a sponsor who already runs existing local authority maintained schools, we expect you to establish a new academy trust to run the maths school. We will provide advice and support. We will not accounts both the new maths school and existing schools in the same trust. We will not consider a proposal to open a free school in a business case. but we expect your case to set out your plans for how you will do this if your business case is approved.

Setting up an academy trust and ensuring you understand the need for strong governance is important. Trustees have legal duties, powers, responsibilities, accountability and the most of functions and functions of an academy trust, see the:

- governance handbook and competency framework
- Academies Financial Handbook

One of the most important tests of a trust's capability is how well it plans for and manages conflicts of interest. Before you form a trust and set up a school and/or trustees, you must consider your plans for connecting work (pre and post opening) to ensure that it is clear that the trust is able to run the school in the best interest of pupils. Trust's consistently operating contracts for individual or organisations in which trustees have a direct or indirect interest, or where trustees are employed by, or have other personal relationships between the individuals currently or academy trust make it difficult to demonstrate that the trust is able to run the school in the best interest of pupils. A conflict can create negative publicity and could affect your maths school's reputation and ability to recruit pupils.

Guidance on procurement and income for schools is available. The Academies Financial Handbook also includes guidance on conflicts of interest and appropriate procurement. Trustees must be able to demonstrate that any potential conflicts of interest are set out in advance. If, TP and IR of the model articles.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Active schools are subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty, which forms part of the Equality Act 2010. This duty requires your trustees, both in planning and running your school, to consider how they can emphasise positive contribution to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between communities.

We and you for evidence that you have considered these responsibilities in your business case.

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Other considerations

Before submitting your business case you will also need to be aware of the following.

Project development funding
Trusts who meet the pre-opening phase criteria will receive a project development grant to support the development of the school and will attract the administrative, transition, site related costs, which will be paid by DfE.

Competitive tenders
You may submit a third party to support you in developing your application through an open and competitive tender process. However, you must not enter into any contracts with the successful bidder before the Secretary of State has approved your application. Up to any individuals or organisation that are not part of your trust, you should explain how you will secure further support during the pre-opening phase if you are approved.

Admissions
Maths schools must have admissions arrangements and criteria that are fair, objective and transparent. Maths schools are subject to the admissions code and SO-EB guides and other criteria because they are 16 to 19 academies and as such neither the School Admissions Code nor the School Admissions Appeals Code applies.

Performance and accountability
All schools, including maths schools, are held to account against the same performance measures. Maths schools must collect performance data, publish results and be subject to Ofsted inspection under the relevant framework.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities
Maths schools must be inclusive of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, including those with education health and care plans (EHCP).

Maths schools must have regard to the SEND code of practice including using their best endeavours to make sure that all pupils get the support they need. They must also ensure teaching staff are trained to meet children and young people's SEN.

Maths schools must also have regard to the Equality Act 2010 and ensure that they do not discriminate against or treat unfavourably a child or young person because of their disability or educational needs on entrance (SENDCS).

Maths schools must also ensure that where the school is named on a child's statement

or EHC plan and all schools must comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments.

Suitability of applicants, due diligence checks and data protection

The Secretary of State for Education permits that only suitable persons may establish publicly funded maths schools.

The seven principles of public life set out the standards of behaviour expected of public office holders, including those who work in education. The principles are:

- selflessness
- integrity
- objectivity
- accountability
- openness
- honesty
- leadership

We will undertake due diligence checks on proposers prior to approving a business case. There is more information about how we will use your data in annex C.

The Secretary of State will not approve business cases put forward by organisations that advocate violence, extremism, or other illegal activities, and may not approve business cases where the previous conduct of individuals associated with the trust does not comply with the seven principles of public life.

We reserve the right to request a suitability and declarations form from any proposer if we deem it necessary. Failure to submit this for all members and trustees and the principal designate (when appointed) is likely to delay the progress of your maths school proposal.

Provision of accommodation

In exceptional cases, it may be possible for a maths school to offer accommodation where it is essential for the long-term viability of the school.

Integration and community cohesion

As with all new free schools, we expect maths schools to consider how they can support integration and community cohesion. A maths school should:

- reflect the ethnic, religious and socioeconomic diversity of the wider local community in its outreach and recruitment
- build opportunities for pupils to interact and build positive relationships with those from different backgrounds, both within the school and the wider local community
- equip pupils with the skills, values and knowledge to become active citizens in wider society and play a positive role in shaping cohesive and integrated communities

Annex C: How we use your data

Personal data is collected on your expression of interest form, your business case and suitability and declarations form. This is so we can consider your proposal to establish a maths school.

Who is the data controller

The Department for Education is the 'data controller' for personal information supplied by universities or partner organisations in their expressions of interest, business cases and suitability and declarations form. We are responsible for ensuring that this information is processed in accordance with all legal requirements.

Any third parties processing personal information on behalf of the Department for Education will be acting as its 'data processors'.

The personal data we will be using

The categories of your personal data that we will be using for this project are:

- names
- date of birth
- current and previous positions and job titles
- companies and organisations
- contact details (work postal address, email address and phone number)

We may also process special category data if declared under section 5 of the suitability and declarations form or when undertaking due diligence checks on applicants. This may include information relating to:

- character declarations, including details of:
  - unspent convictions
  - motoring offences
  - police cautions
  - insolvency
  - bankruptcy
- health declarations
- any orders made against you in relation to working with vulnerable individuals
- addresses for the last 5 years
- passport details
- driving licence details

Why our use of your personal data is lawful

In order for our use of your personal data to be lawful, we need to meet one (or more) conditions in the data protection legislation. For the purpose of this project, the relevant conditions we are meeting are Article 6 (1)(e) of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and Article 9 (2)(g) GDPR in that our processing of personal and special category data is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest for the exercise of our functions as a government department.

Publication

We are committed to being as transparent as possible. As such, if your business case is approved, we will publish the approved case on GOV.UK. The following information will be redacted from the application and will not be visible to the public:

- private addresses
- private email addresses
- private telephone numbers
- commercially sensitive information
- specific site locations
- CVs

All other information, including the names of individuals and organisations mentioned in the business case, will be published.

You should notify any individuals or organisations that you have named in your expression of interest or business case that their information will be processed by us and that if approved the business case will be published on GOV.UK.

Who we will make your personal data available to

We sometimes need to make personal data available to other organisations. These might include contracted partners (who we have employed to process your personal data on our behalf) or other organisations (with whom we need to share your personal data for specific purposes).

Where we need to share your personal data with others, we ensure that this sharing complies with data protection legislation. For the purpose of this project education experts (previously education advisers) and independent panel members will be viewing your personal data as part of the decision-making process. We will share your personal information with third parties for the purpose of conducting checks on your suitability to run a free school, where this is allowed by law for the purpose of enabling these organisations to carry out their functions.

How long we will keep your personal data

We will keep your personal data only for as long as we need it for the purpose(s) of this piece of work, after which point it will be securely destroyed. We estimate that we will keep your personal data for no longer than 10 years.

Under data protection legislation, and in compliance with the relevant data processing conditions, we can lawfully keep personal data processed purely for research and statistical purposes indefinitely.

Your data protection rights

Under certain circumstances, you have the right to:

- ask us for access to information about you that we hold
- have your personal data rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete
- request the deletion or removal of personal data where there is no compelling reason for its continued processing
- restrict our processing of your personal data (such as permitting its storage but no further processing)
- object to direct marketing (including profiling) and processing for the purposes of scientific or historical research and statistics
- not be subject to decisions based purely on automated processing where it produces a legal or similarly significant effect on you

You have the right to raise any concerns with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Withdrawal of consent and the right to lodge a complaint

Where we are processing your personal data with your consent, you have the right to withdraw that consent. If you change your mind, or you are unhappy with our use of your personal data, let us know by contacting us using 'maths schools' as the reference. If you wish to contact DfE's Data Protection Officer (DPO), indicate in the reference that your enquiry is 'for the attention of the DPO'.

Alternatively, you have the right to raise any concerns with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

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