



Department
for Education

Free school applications: criteria for assessment

Alternative Provision

July 2013

Contents

Introduction	4
Routes of entry	4
Single and multiple applications	5
What to fill in for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications	5
16 to 19	5
Initial assessment	5
How applications will be assessed	6
Section A – Applicant details	7
Section B – Outline of the school	8
Section C – Vision	9
C1 - A credible proposal to deliver a high quality free school and a clear rationale for establishing it in this area	9
Section D – Education Plan	11
D1 - An ambitious and deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake	13
D2 - Measuring pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets	15
D3 - A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels	16
D4 – The particular needs of the children coming to the school have been carefully considered and will be met appropriately	17
Section E – Evidence of Need	18
E1 – Valid evidence that there is a need for this school in the area (for pre-16)	19
E2 – Valid evidence that there is a need for this school in the area (for post-16)	20
E3 – Clear plans to manage referrals	22

Section F – Capacity and Capability	23
F1 – The necessary experience and credentials to deliver the school to opening	26
F2 - A governance structure, roles and responsibilities that will ensure accountability and effective decision making in this academy trust and drive improvement in the new free school	28
F3 – Skills gaps identified for once the school is open and a plan is in place to fill them. Any governors identified already have the experience, track record and commitment to drive improvement in a free school, and manage the trust effectively	29
F4 – A credible plan for recruiting a high quality principal during pre-opening	30
F5 - Educational track record (existing providers)	31
F6 – Capacity to expand (existing providers and any new applicants seeking to open more than one free school)	32
F7 – Independent schools have a good educational track record	34
F8 – Independent schools have a good financial track record	35
Section G – Budget planning and affordability	36
G1 - Accurate financial plans that are consistent with the rest of the application and based on realistic assumptions about income and expenditure	38
G2 - The school will be viable within the expected levels of funding available both while it builds up and when it is at full capacity	39
G3 - The school will be financially resilient to reductions in income	40
Section H – Premises	41
Annex A – completing the budget planning spreadsheet	43

Please make sure you have read the [How to Apply](#) guidance before reading this booklet.

The Word application form and the Excel application form and budget planning template are both available on the [Department's website](#).

Introduction

Routes of entry

As a reminder before you start, there are two routes to follow when applying to establish a free school:

Route 1 – applicants who have:

- an open free school of the same type and phase; or
- a free school of the same type and phase currently in pre-opening.

Route 2 – all other applicants

The purpose of Route 1 is to avoid asking you to provide information that we have seen before. If you have previously been approved to open a free school, we still hold a copy of your previous application. Instead of asking you to duplicate information in all areas, you will need to provide a brief statement and commentary of significant differences between this application and your last approved application for most of the education plan section. We will also take into account the views of your DfE lead contact and your named education adviser, based on their experience of your educational model during pre-opening and, if applicable, when open.

If you are proposing a different education plan, you are free to submit a full Route 2 application. Indeed, you will not be eligible for Route 1 if:

- You are establishing a different type of school (e.g. if you were previously approved to open a mainstream school and are now applying to open an alternative provision (AP) school)
- You are establishing a different phase of school (e.g. if you were previously approved to open a secondary school and are now applying to open a primary school)
- You operate a type of school that is not a free school (e.g. you are an academy sponsor that has not previously submitted a free school application). This is because we need more information than we currently hold to fairly assess your application

Single and multiple applications

It is possible to apply for one or more free schools in the same round, irrespective of whether you apply through Route 1 or Route 2. It is also possible to complete a single application form covering more than one school, where this avoids duplication:

- Submit one application covering all schools if: all your proposed free schools are of the same phase and type (e.g. all mainstream primary, all AP secondary) and will follow the same educational model (e.g. all teaching the same or similar curriculum, all staffed in the same or a similar way)
- Submit different applications for each school if: each of your proposed free schools are of a different phase and/or type or if your proposed schools are of the same phase and type, but each school will follow a different model
- Submit a mix of combined and single applications if: some of your proposed free schools will be of the same phase and type, and follow a similar educational model, but others will be different

What to fill in for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Where the information required from you in response to a criterion is different because you are a Route 1 or Route 2 applicant or because you are applying for one or more than one free school, this is set out at the end of each section and clearly marked.

16 to 19

We have clearly marked information that relates to the 16 to 19 age range.

Initial assessment

All criteria are important and you should complete your entire application with care and consideration. The capacity and capability of your group and the need for your school will both be critical to your school's success. Therefore, we will look at these two elements of your application first. **If your capacity or capability is not strong – including if you have a poor track record as an established provider – or you are unable to demonstrate a clear need for the school, it is likely that your application will not be considered further and you may not get feedback on the other sections.**

Group capacity and capability - You will need to show that your team includes the right people to set up your school in the pre-opening phase and the right people to hold it to account as governors once it is open. These may not necessarily be the same people.

Need for the school - You will need to show that your school is needed in the local community and will have enough pupils to be financially viable. You should collect evidence of pre-16 demand showing that commissioners (i.e. local authorities (LAs), schools and academies) will refer their pupils to your specific school and will pay the required top-up fees. To prove 16-19 demand you should provide evidence that students of the correct age have chosen your specific provision as their first choice.

You will need to build a case for your free school by providing a brief description of the AP provision in the area that your school might receive its pupils from, and why your free school will offer something different and of higher quality. You should show whether there is a shortage of high quality places for pupils with those needs in the LA or neighbouring LAs.

If there is a surplus of good quality AP school places in your area, we will expect you to show even more evidence of commissioner or 16-19 pupil demand.

How applications will be assessed

As you will see in this booklet, we explain under each criterion how we will assess your application and what you need to do to be rated most highly.

Section A – Applicant details

In this section we ask you for basic information about your group and your company limited by guarantee.

As companies limited by guarantee, certain details will be publicly available on the Companies House website. However, the personal information you provide in **Section A** will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Personal data is collected on the Word and Excel templates in order to consider an application to set up a Free School and will not be used for other purposes. For the purposes of the Data Protection Act, the Department for Education is the data controller for this personal information and for ensuring that it is processed in accordance with the terms of the Act. The Department will hold all personal information you supply securely and will only make it available to those who need to see it as part of the free school application process. All personal information supplied in these forms will only be retained for as long as it is needed for this process.

There are no assessment criteria for this section.

Section B – Outline of the school

In this section we ask you for key details on the type of free school you are proposing.

There are no assessment criteria for this section.

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Route 1 / Route 2:

You must provide the same information in sections A and B regardless of whether you are a Route 1 or Route 2 applicant.

Single / multiple:

If you are applying to establish more than one free school under the same multi-academy trust, you need only complete one version of section A.

If you are applying for more than one free school but with each free school managed by a different trust, you must complete separate versions of section A for each school and make clear the connection between your applications.

If you are applying for more than one free school, you must complete section B (and the rest of the Excel spreadsheet apart from section A) for each free school you are applying for.

Section C – Vision

Your education vision should describe why you want to set up your particular free school in the particular area you have identified, its core features and the needs of the pupils you intend to cater for. This is your opportunity to tell us in your own words about the overarching vision for your school and how it informs your education plan. Your application should be coherent and consistent throughout and work together as a cohesive whole. You will need to demonstrate in later sections that the vision is both deliverable and affordable within the funding allocated to free schools.

If you are making a case to open in 2014 rather than 2015 or beyond, please set out your arguments in this section.

We will be using one criterion to assess this section of your application.

C1 - A credible proposal to deliver a high quality free school and a clear rationale for establishing it in this area

You must:

- Demonstrate that your vision is deliverable (this will be assessed across your whole application but needs to be clearly set out in this section)
- Ensure your vision is consistent with the rest of your application
- Show that your school will offer a high quality education (e.g. that you have set high ambitions for standards of teaching and pupil outcomes including reintegration to mainstream or progression e.g. to employment)
- Include a brief explanation of why you are seeking to establish your free school in this particular area, including facts and figures relating to the local context (any current or forecast shortage of AP places in the local area and the quality of local educational provision)
- Include a brief explanation of the key features of your school, including the proposed age range, details about the expected pupil population, the needs of the pupils it will cater for and any particular ethos you wish your school to have (e.g. any religious or other beliefs)

We will also assess the **quality** of your vision by how far your proposed school will:

- Add to choice/diversity of provision locally
- Offer higher standards than local alternative provision

- Respond to demand from commissioners
- Make use of academy freedoms to differentiate your model from existing provision

You will be rated more highly if you can make a **compelling** case that your school will address **most** of these factors.

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Route 1 / Route 2

You must provide the same information here regardless of whether you are a Route 1 or Route 2 applicant.

Single / multiple

If you are applying to establish **more than one free school, you have a free school about to open or you have any open state funded or independent school*** you must also provide:

- A brief overarching vision for your chain, including: the number and types of open schools you already manage and have in pre-opening (including free schools, academies, voluntary aided schools and independent schools); and your planned expansion strategy (including how many schools you hope to have in total, your planned geographical spread and timescales)

* You do not need to provide this information if you are applying to convert a single independent school into a free school

We would normally expect the vision section to be about 5 pages long for a single school (and longer in the case of multiple applicants).

Section D – Education Plan

This is the heart of your application. Your education plan must explain how your school will achieve its education vision. You should note that section D in the application form includes two parts for you to fill out.

Part 1 asks you to fill out a table showing how your school will grow over time to full capacity. The numbers included in this table must be consistent with the pupil numbers used in the budget planning spreadsheet. **All applicants** must complete this table. **Multiple applicants** must complete a separate table for **each school they are proposing**.

We would generally expect AP free schools to be at full capacity no later than the start of the fourth year of operation.

Part 2 is where you should provide the information relevant to the criteria below.

The education plan must set out your **high level strategies** for:

- D1 - the curriculum
- D2 - setting and achieving targets
- D3 - the staffing structure
- D4 - ensuring the particular needs of the children coming to your school have been carefully considered and will be met appropriately

These strategies must demonstrate how you will deliver your vision. As well as being achievable, your education plan must be affordable within the funding allocated to free schools and consistent with your financial plans.

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Route 1 / Route 2

If you are a **Route 1 applicant** (either for a **single school** or for **more than one school**), we already hold information about your education plan from your previous application(s). If all your schools use a similar curriculum model and your approach to the curriculum, staffing and target setting will be the same or similar in each school, you need only provide a brief statement and commentary of significant differences between this application and your last approved application for criteria D1, D2 and D4. We will use our existing knowledge of your education model to assess this section. We will also take into account the views of your DfE lead contact and your named education adviser,

based on their experience of your educational model during pre-opening and, if applicable, when open. You should complete D3 for each school you are applying for.

If you are a **Route 2 applicant**, please complete D1-D4.

Single / multiple

If you are a **Route 2 applicant applying for more than one school**, provide one version of this section, referring to individual schools or circumstances where relevant (e.g. setting and achieving targets).

D1 - An ambitious and deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake

You must:

- Demonstrate that your proposed curriculum will be deliverable
- Ensure pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that is varied, stretching and includes English and mathematics. Please complete the tables in the application form with:
 - A list of subjects to be offered with the number of hours spent per week on each. You do not need to provide sample timetables
 - The length of the school day, including any enrichment time, making a distinction between compulsory and voluntary activities
- Offer appropriate qualifications
- Demonstrate an intention to work with other providers to ensure an age-appropriate curriculum where children attend part-time or short term

We will also assess the **quality** of the curriculum plan by how far it demonstrates that you have:

- An understanding of the expected pupil intake and their needs
- A rationale for the type of curriculum proposed which is consistent with the vision. Please explain how it meets the needs of the expected intake, whilst having an ambitious approach to meeting those needs. If you are proposing to teach something other than the national curriculum, please reference – but don't copy and paste – evidence (where it is available) which demonstrates that it is a good and successful model (e.g. results of academic research)
- Strategies in place to support pupils to be successful when they enter and leave the school, including the curriculum supporting transition to and from referring schools
- An appropriate enrichment programme, describing activities that might take place in extended hours

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Route 1 applicants

You must:

- Provide a brief statement explaining which of your existing schools your curriculum is modelled on with an explanation as to why you have chosen to use that model in this school and any evidence of its success
- Outline any differences between what you are proposing for this school and the model we approved previously, with a brief explanation for the changes (e.g. to cater for a different pupil population or for pupils with different needs)

We would normally expect section D1 to be 8-10 pages long for Route 1 applications and 20-30 pages long for Route 2.

D2 - Measuring pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets

You must:

- Describe an assessment and data tracking system that will allow pupil performance to be monitored and ensure successful re-integration to mainstream schooling where appropriate or progressing e.g. to employment
- Have ambitious and realistic targets for pupil performance, behaviour and attendance, explaining why they are suitable to measure the delivery of your education vision, and what your strategy will be to achieve them
- Explain how you will review success measures and targets regularly to improve the school's performance

We will also assess the **quality** of your plans to:

- Use appropriate data to inform teaching and drive progression and attainment for all pupils
- Focus on measuring and improving quality of teaching in the classroom
- Liaise with and report progress to parents and commissioners

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Route 1 applicants

You must:

- Outline any differences between what you are proposing for this school and the model we approved previously, with a brief explanation for the changes. This should include targets specific to this school with a brief explanation as to why they are appropriate

We would normally expect section D2 to be about 2 pages long for Route 1 applications and 5 pages long for Route 2.

D3 - A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels

You must:

- Demonstrate that as the school grows to full capacity, you have an affordable staffing structure and sensible phasing plans that deliver a suitable (interim) curriculum plan. Provide diagrams or tables showing the proposed staffing structure each year until the school is at full capacity in line with planned pupil numbers
- Demonstrate that at full capacity, your staffing structure is sufficient to deliver the curriculum plan; consistent with the information provided in the budget plans; and affordable

We will also assess the **quality** of the staffing structure through the extent to which:

- It includes an appropriate balance of roles, experience and expertise e.g. senior leadership team, middle managers, subject leaders, teachers, non-teachers etc.
- You have credible contingency plans to adapt your staffing structure if income were to be less than expected

In setting out the plans you have for staffing the school, we will use your budget plans to assess whether they are affordable. You do not need to provide a commentary or explanation on affordability, or contingency plans in this section.

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Route 1 applicants must complete this section as above and:

- Explain whether you intend to use any of your existing staff in this school, and if so how this will work in practice and why the staff in question are the correct choice for this school

We would normally expect section D3 to be 5-10 pages long

D4 – The particular needs of the children coming to the school have been carefully considered and will be met appropriately

You must:

- Explain the types of need the school will cater for and how the school will cater for these needs
- Include a strategy to assess and meet the needs of all pupils
- Include a clear role for the SENCo

We will also assess the **quality** of your plan to meet the needs of the children through the extent to which:

- Your strategies to cater for identified types of need represent best practice
- You will engage with other agencies and they will be involved to support pupil development
- You will ensure safeguarding, good behaviour and good attendance and that any health needs will be met
- Pupils identified with special educational needs have been properly considered
- You have considered the varying lengths of pupil placements

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Route 1 applicants

You must:

- Outline any differences between what you are proposing for this school and the model we approved previously, with a brief explanation for the changes

We would normally expect section D4 to be about 2 pages long for Route 1 applications and 5 pages long for Route 2.

Section E – Evidence of Need

We will assess whether there is **need** for your school by weighing up commissioner demand (**or student demand for 16 to 19 places**), the need for additional AP places and the standards of local alternative provision.

We will look at the data you have provided to judge the level of need and the extent to which you have engaged with commissioners (**or students for 16 to 19 places**).

We will look at your plans for managing the referrals process with your local commissioners (for pre-16 places) and for admitting students (**for post-16 places**).

Differences for Route 1/Route 2 and single/multiple applications

Route 1 / Route 2

You should complete this section in the same way regardless of whether you are a Route 1 or Route 2 applicant.

Single / multiple

If you are applying for **more than one school**, you need to complete each criterion for each school you are applying for.

E1 – Valid evidence that there is a need for this school in the area (for pre-16)

You will need to be able to demonstrate that you have interest from commissioners for places in each of the school's first two years of operation and some indication that top-up funding will be paid.

You must:

- Complete the commissioner demand table in the application form showing how many places commissioners would buy at the school for the first two years of the school's operation
- Provide commitments in writing from commissioners for a specific number of places in the first two years, including the top-up funding they will pay
- Demonstrate that potential commissioners have made an informed decision when choosing your school. Please include the text you have used in leaflets or other promotional material for prospective commissioners about the particular characteristics of your provision. You must make sure that this adequately describes the provision you are proposing; we will not consider generic expressions of interest in new alternative provision to be sufficient evidence that there is commissioner demand for what you are proposing
- Provide evidence that there is a shortage of high quality places for pupils with these needs in the LA or neighbouring LAs

You will be rated more highly if:

- Your school has commissioner referrals equal to the number of places in the first and second year of operation
- Commissioners have committed to pay the required levels of top-up funding
- You provide compelling evidence that there is a shortage of high quality places for pupils with these needs in the LA or neighbouring LAs

Independent providers must:

- Present evidence of demand from current and prospective commissioners separately

E2 – Valid evidence that there is a need for this school in the area (for post-16)

You will need to be able to demonstrate that you have interest from students that is close to the school's capacity for each of the school's first two years of operation

You must:

- Complete the student demand table in the application form showing how many students would select your provision as their first choice for the first two years of operation
- Demonstrate that potential students have made an informed decision when choosing your provision as their first choice. Please include the text you have used in leaflets or other promotional material for prospective students about the particular characteristics of your provision. You must make sure that this adequately describes what you are proposing; we will not consider generic expressions of interest in new AP to be sufficient evidence that there is demand for what you are proposing
- Provide a map which shows that potential students live within commuting distance of your school

We will also look at demographic data to see if it supports the case for your 16-19 provision, specifically:

- the number of students eligible for post-16 education in the area in which you plan to locate your provision; and
- the number of students currently in post-16 provision in the area.

If you would like to make a case for either of the points above then please do so, but this is not essential. If you have already set this out in the vision section, please refer to the relevant page.

You will be rated more highly if:

- Expressions of interest from students significantly exceed the number of places available in the first two years; or
- You provide compelling evidence that there are a shortage of high quality places for students with these needs in the LA or neighbouring LAs.

Independent providers must:

- Present evidence of demand from current and prospective students separately

We would normally expect section E2 to be about 5 pages long.

E3 – Clear plans to manage referrals

You must:

- Show how you will manage referrals effectively, attracting pupils that will benefit most from the provision throughout the year
- Show your admissions arrangements for 16-19 pupils are fair, objective and transparent

We will also assess the **quality** of the case you make that:

- Pupils will be assessed effectively on entry and this information will be used to ensure appropriate provision is made for the pupil
- Information will be shared regularly and effectively with commissioners and parents to ensure successful re-integration

We would expect section E3 to be about 5 pages long.

Section F – Capacity and Capability

You must demonstrate that your group has the capacity and capability to set up and run a school. You must have access to appropriate educational, financial and other expertise, either within your group or externally.

All applicants must complete sections F1-F8 as set out in the table below:

Type of applicant	Which sections to complete
Route 1 applicants (both single and multiple)	F1-F6*
Route 2 applicants applying for more than one free school in this round	F1-F6*
Route 2 applicants applying for one free school in this round who already have an open academy	F1-F6*
Independent schools wishing to ‘sponsor’ a new free school	F1-F6*
Independent providers wishing to become free schools	F1-F4 and F7-F8

* If you are an **approved academy sponsor** (by which we mean approved by the Department to sponsor academies), we already hold the information requested in F5 and F6 so you do not need to complete these sections.

Throughout sections F and G, we will ask you to provide details of educational and financial expertise. When we ask this, please include the information below using the template CV provided in the Word application form.

Educational expertise

- If an individual is or was a member of a school leadership team, please provide their CV, including:
 - Details of their last three roles – the school(s) in which they were employed, their position(s) and how long they were in each position
 - The school’s results for the years they were in post – these should include, as appropriate, Key Stage 2 results, 5A*-C GCSE including English and

- maths results or, for **16 to 19**, average point score per entry and per student for level 3 qualifications. If these results are not available, they should set out the track record of the school they led in terms of both qualifications achieved and the positive destination of pupils (i.e. successful re-integration of pupils to mainstream where appropriate or progression e.g. to employment)
- Best 8 value added scores for the years they were in post in each school, if available
 - A brief commentary on why their previous experience is relevant for this proposed free school
 - At least one referee who is able to confirm their education credentials. We may make other enquiries as we see fit
 - *Optionally*: any other brief comments they wish to make on how their role(s) had an impact on raising standards
- If an individual is or was a teacher or head of department/faculty but not a member of the leadership team, please provide their CV, including:
 - Details of their last three roles – the school(s) in which they were employed, their position(s) and how long they were in each position
 - Their subject/department's results for the years they were in post, compared to their school's averages – these should include, as appropriate, Key Stage 2 results, 5A*-C GCSE including English and maths results or, for **16 to 19**, average point score per entry and per student for level 3 qualifications. If these results are not available, they should set out the track record of their subject/department/school in terms of both qualifications achieved and the positive destination of pupils (i.e. successful re-integration of pupils to mainstream where appropriate or progression e.g. to employment)
 - A brief commentary on why their previous experience is relevant for this proposed free school
 - At least one referee who is able to confirm their education credentials. We may make other enquiries as we see fit
 - *Optionally*: any other brief comments they wish to make on how their role(s) had an impact on raising standards

Financial expertise

- For the group's nominated finance lead(s), please provide their CV, including:
 - Details of their last three roles – where they were employed, what their role was, how long they were in each role and what their financial responsibilities were
 - A brief commentary on why their previous financial experience is relevant for this proposed free school
 - Details of their professional financial qualifications
 - At least one referee who is able to confirm their finance credentials. We may make other enquiries as we see fit

Please note that CVs should be included in the appendices and do not count within the page limit.

F1 – The necessary experience and credentials to deliver the school to opening

You must:

- Demonstrate that you have access to individuals with adequate relevant education and finance expertise with specific and sufficient time commitments
- Demonstrate that you have access to individuals with specific and sufficient time commitments and relevant experience in as many of the following as possible:
 - Alternative provision
 - Managing school finances
 - Leadership
 - Project management
 - Marketing
 - Human resources

We will also assess the quality of:

- Your strategy to fill the skills gaps you have identified
- The track record of the individuals you have listed as experts in the areas named above

You will be rated more highly if:

- The individuals with education and finance expertise form part of your core applicant group
- You have individuals with expertise in most of the additional five areas listed under bullet 2 under the 'you must' heading above and that they form part of your core applicant group
- The individuals listed have a strong track record in their areas of expertise

In order for us to assess your application, please complete the **two tables** in the application form.

The **first table** asks you to fill out the following information about each individual who is part of your group or whose expertise you intend to access:

- Name
- Role in pre-opening. Please include whether the individual is part of the core applicant group, or someone whose support you are accessing
- Area of expertise (education, finance or other. If the latter, please specify)
- Other relevant expertise and experience e.g. in starting up businesses
- Average time commitments for all the individuals named in pre-opening (in hours per week)

CVs for the individuals you name, which include the information requested in the bullets in the introduction to section F, should be included as annexes.

The **second table** asks you to set out any skills gaps that you think exist within your group and how you intend to fill them.

We would normally expect section F1 to be about 5 pages long.

F2 - A governance structure, roles and responsibilities that will ensure accountability and effective decision making in this academy trust and drive improvement in the new free school

You must:

- Provide a diagram showing your proposed governance structure, including lines of accountability between the company members, the school's governors and the principal. The governance structure must be in line with accepted academy trust models and the Academies Financial Handbook, with a clear and appropriate division of roles and responsibilities between members, governors and the school's senior leadership team
- Include a brief explanation of the roles and responsibilities of the company members, the governors, any proposed committees and the principal
- Include a strategy for avoiding and minimising conflicts of interest and for securing independent challenge to members and governors
- Include a brief description of any conflicts of interest and an explanation of how you intend to manage them

We will also consider the proposed size and structure of your governing body and whether it will enable effective decision making.

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Single / multiple

If you are a Route 1 applicant or a Route 2 applicant applying for more than one school or that already runs schools under the same trust, you must also provide:

- A diagram showing the governance structure which ensures clear accountability and scrutiny arrangements between the centre and each free school or academy (or other type of school if relevant)
- A brief explanation of the strategic remit of the board together with the remit of local governing bodies and their structure
- A brief explanation as to how the trust would intervene quickly in an academy or free school should that be deemed necessary and how it would know to do so

We would normally expect section F2 to be about 5 pages long.

F3 – Skills gaps identified for once the school is open and a plan is in place to fill them. Any governors identified already have the experience, track record and commitment to drive improvement in a free school, and manage the trust effectively

You must have:

- Conducted a skills gap analysis of governors already identified
- Set out a plan to recruit and train high quality governors, particularly those with education, school governance and finance experience, and specific and sufficient time commitments

We will assess the **quality** of your skills gap analysis.

You will be rated more highly if:

- You already have individuals in your core applicant group who would make strong governors once the school is open
- The individuals named as governors have excellent relevant school finance and leadership experience

In order for us to assess your application, you must complete the **two tables** in the application form.

The **first table** asks you to fill out the following information for each individual who is part of your group or whose expertise you intend to access for the governing body:

- Name
- Role on governing body
- Area of expertise (education, finance or other. If the latter, please specify)
- Other relevant expertise and experience
- Time commitment when the school is open (in hours per week)

CVs for the individuals you name, which include the information requested in the bullets in the introduction to section F, should be included as annexes.

The **second table** asks you to set out any skills gaps on your governing body and how you intend to fill them.

We would normally expect section F3 to be about 5 pages long.

F4 – A credible plan for recruiting a high quality principal during pre-opening

You must:

- Provide a brief explanation of the role of the principal and the skills required

And either:

- Have identified a principal with a relevant and credible educational track record as a senior school leader and who shows clear potential to be a competent principal of this school. Please provide a CV for your proposed principal in the annex. See the bullets in the introduction to section F for what to include

Or

- Have suggested a sensible timeline for hiring a principal and defined a role and salary that will attract principal candidates with relevant experience and credible track records of school or academy leadership. Please provide a brief explanation of why you think you can attract high calibre candidates to the role

In addition to either of the above, you must:

- Ensure the principal's salary will be affordable within the financial plan

You will be rated more highly if you have identified a principal with an **exemplary** educational track record as a senior leader and who shows clear potential to be an **excellent** principal of this school.

We will use the information you provide in section G to determine whether the principal's salary will be affordable. You do not need to provide any additional financial information in this section.

We would normally expect section F4 to be about 5 pages long.

F5 - Educational track record (existing providers)

If you need to complete this section (see the Section F introductory text), you must provide the following:

- The date and overall judgement of your latest Ofsted inspection with the link to the full report for each of your schools
- Links to the most recent performance data for each of your schools. Please provide a brief explanation of any anomalies you think we should be aware of
- A list of the key people you will use to provide school improvement support. Please provide CVs in the annex for each individual in line with the bullets in the introduction to section F relating to education. Please also provide details of when they have supported other schools, if applicable, and references to Ofsted judgements where they have been directly responsible for a positive transformation
- A list of the people (or organisation) that will provide any central service/support to the trust/academies. Please provide CVs in the annex for each individual in line with the bullets in the introduction to section F relating to education and finance. Indicate how you will be sure these services will provide value for money
- Indicate how your model will allow the trust to grow and provide on-going challenge and support to your academies. Where relevant, please state how you will source additional capacity if required

In order to be rated highly, you must have:

- A **high calibre** of educational leadership
- **Compelling** evidence of high, sustained educational impact, including:
 - Ofsted S5 judgements of quality of teaching, leadership and management are 'outstanding' in each of your schools
 - Group members' individual track record in previous schools is strong as shown by Ofsted outstanding ratings and in ensuring that AP pupils achieve a good quality education on par with that of mainstream

We would normally expect section F5 to be about 5 pages long.

F6 – Capacity to expand (existing providers and any new applicants seeking to open more than one free school)

If you need to complete this section (see the Section F introductory text), you must:

- Provide evidence of relevant financial expertise at sponsor/trust level where not already covered in F1. Please include CVs in the annex for each individual in line with the bullets in the introduction to section F
- Include the name of your finance director and include their CV in the annex (which should include the information in the bullets in the introduction to section F relating to finance)
- Provide a brief outline of the financial performance of your school/academy/trust/institution during the last 4 years, including details of any adverse audit opinions from any sources
- Provide a credible plan to provide support and challenge to the new free school(s)
- Explain how you plan to get efficiencies and economies of scale by sharing services across your schools

If your group is proposing to make use of a shared service function (either through a multi-academy trust, sponsor or other related organisation), you must also:

- Complete the **table** in the application form with the projected make-up of the 'central team' and their approximate cost, if applicable. Please include CVs in the annex that detail the information as set out in the bullets in the introduction to section F in terms of education and finance to demonstrate how they can support the new free school(s) through pre-opening and beyond for anyone not already covered in F1
- Explain any additional skills and expertise within the shared service function that you have not already explained in other parts of section F. Please include CVs in the annex that detail the information as set out in the bullets in the introduction to section F in terms of education and finance
- Set out a brief description of how your shared service function will be financed. This should include which services are provided by the shared service function, what the costs are likely to be to each academy or school (e.g. top-slice/per-head contribution) and what this funding will provide. Please complete the table in the application form

- Include a list of any additional services which can be purchased by each academy or school if the local governing body decides and the approximate costs of these additional services
- Explain who will monitor the performance of the shared service function and how
- A brief outline of how your current capacity will grow to match your ambition for the trust and how you intend to finance the growth of the trust

This information should be sufficiently detailed to allow us to make an assessment of both the capacity and capability and the value for money of the shared service provision.

We will also assess the **quality** of the evidence you can provide in relation to:

- Your improvement plans and how you provide the appropriate scrutiny to every academy or school
- Contingency planning and risk management
- Capacity and capability to intervene quickly across all areas of the school(s)
- High calibre financial leadership
- Robust financial track record and good value for money
- Whether the free school(s) will benefit from support and challenge from a highly skilled, focused local governing body, with the necessary delegated authority to carry out its functions

You will be rated more highly if you have **compelling** evidence demonstrating that you have good plans in place to meet **most** of the points above.

We would normally expect section F6 to be 5-10 pages long.

F7 – Independent schools have a good educational track record

Pages 12-14 of the [How to Apply guidance](#) explains the minimum criteria you need to meet as an independent school wanting to become an AP free school and how we assess these applications. Please read this section carefully before deciding to apply.

If you meet the minimum criteria and decide to apply, you must:

- Provide the date and overall judgement of your latest inspection with the link to the full report
- Complete a self-assessment against the Ofsted section 5 framework. A template is included in the application form

In order to be rated highly, your school needs to be outstanding (or equivalent) in all areas of your latest inspection.

We would normally expect section F7 to be about 5 pages long.

F8 – Independent schools have a good financial track record

If you meet the minimum criteria and decide to apply, you must:

- Provide a brief outline of the financial performance of your school during the last 4 years. Submit the school's audited financial statements for the last two years with your completed application form. Supply alternative evidence of the school's current financial health if the school has not been open long enough to have two years' worth of audited accounts
- Tell us about any relevant financial issues relating to the potential conversion to free school status and explain how you will seek to address them. You should expect to discuss these in greater detail in later stages of the application process. Examples of financial issues which may impact on becoming a free school include running at an operating deficit or having outstanding loans and overdrafts, including mortgages
- Confirm in writing that you have disclosed all financial liabilities
- Provide an explanation of your existing and planned internal and external financial management and governance arrangements, including for scrutiny and challenge

In order to be rated highly, your school's existing governance arrangements must be **strong** and your existing school must have an **outstanding** track record of financial management.

We would normally expect section F8 to be about 5 pages long.

Section G – Budget planning and affordability

Before you begin to develop and complete your plans, you should read:

- the overview of free school funding in [Annex A of the How to Apply guidance](#) which explains how your school will be funded once open
- **Annex A** in this document for detailed guidance on how to complete the budget planning spreadsheet

We first ask you to provide a budget plan showing your income and expenditure as your school grows to full capacity. We want to check that your financial plans will support delivery of your education vision and plan and that your school is viable with the funding provided. For the budget plan (the G1 and G2 criteria) you need to provide a narrative in the Word application form and complete the relevant sections of the Excel template.

We want to make sure that your school is resilient to changes in income both as a result of having fewer pupils than expected and receiving a lower top-up rate than expected.

We will ask you to explain what changes you would make if you had to operate with only 70% of your expected intake.

Row 68 on the 'budget' tab on the Excel template named 'Total income (70%)' will provide you with the required overall savings figure.

This 70% figure is calculated using the following assumptions:

- that you would still receive the £8,000 per place for the 100% number of pupils your school intends to cater for in the first year. This figure will reduce to £8,000 for 70% of the places from the second year onwards
- that you will not receive top-up funding for the 30% of places not filled

We will also ask you to explain the rationale behind the top-up rate you have chosen. If your top-up rate is higher than your local authority per-pupil rate, you should explain the savings you would make if the rate were to be reduced.

Differences for Route 1/Route 2 and single/multiple applications

Route 1 / Route 2

You should complete this section in the same way regardless of whether you are a Route 1 or Route 2 applicant.

Single / multiple

If you are applying for **more than one school**, you need to complete each criterion for each school you are applying for.

G1 - Accurate financial plans that are consistent with the rest of the application and based on realistic assumptions about income and expenditure

You must:

- Include an overview explanation in section G of the Word application form of how you developed your plans and the strategic decisions underpinning them. As part of this, you should explain how you would deliver value for money, and describe how your budget plan would support delivery of your education vision and plan
- Complete a budget plan showing income and planned expenditure in the Excel template and include the assumptions made about income and expenditure in the space provided. You should explain clearly what you have based your assumptions on and the evidence you have to show these are realistic and appropriate.
- Make sure that the information in your plan is consistent with the other parts of your application e.g. the staffing structure and pupil numbers in the education plan should agree with the budget plan
- Demonstrate that no material errors have been made in completing the budget plan
- Show that you have allowed for unforeseen problems and have contingencies

We will also assess the **quality** of your budget plan by the extent to which it is reasonable, represents good value for money and is prudent. In making this assessment we will consider:

- Core operating income / expenditure assumptions
- Benchmarking information for income and expenditure, including rates of top-up funding
- Contingencies
- Any centrally provided services and their costs
- Proportion of spend allocated to each budget area – and particularly to staffing
- Staff to pupil ratios
- The school's particular education offer (e.g. specialist teachers, equipment, types of SEN)

If you are invited to interview, we will assess how well you answer financial scrutiny questions.

We would normally expect the Word part of section G1 to be about 5 pages long.

G2 - The school will be viable within the expected levels of funding available both while it builds up and when it is at full capacity

You must:

- Demonstrate that the school is projected to at least break even at steady state (the year after you reach full capacity)
- Not show a cumulative deficit in any year. Any in-year deficits must be planned for by accumulating a surplus in (a) previous year(s)
- Not be dependent on borrowing or third party income to break even in any year

We will also assess the **quality** of the decisions you have taken regarding the levels of in year deficit and overall surplus, looking at the factors set out under G1

G3 - The school will be financially resilient to reductions in income

You must:

- Include an overview explanation in Section G of the Word application form of how you approached making 30% savings. As part of this, you should explain how your amended plans would continue to support delivery of your education vision and plan
- Complete the table in the Word application form to explain how your vision and plan would be delivered if you had to operate with only 70% of your expected intake
- If the top-up rate you think you will require is higher than your local authority per-pupil rate, please explain the actions you would take to reduce costs if you were only able to attract a top up equivalent to this rate. You should set out the reasons for the actions you propose to make savings, the reason you have prioritised the actions as you have and the savings that would result. These savings should allow you to balance your budget assuming the local authority per-pupil rate as your top-up rate

We will also assess the **quality** of the plan by the extent to which:

- The changes proposed will result in an education plan which is affordable, will minimise compromising quality and will meet the vision for the school
- The changes outlined in the 70% table have taken into account the particular characteristics of your school

We would normally expect the Word part of section G3 to be about 5 pages long.

Section H – Premises

Finding a suitable site is an essential part of opening a free school. As part of preparing your application you should investigate potential sites for your school and tell us about them in your application.

There are no criteria for this section of your application, although we make a value for money judgement on each free school application that includes likely site costs.

Differences for Route 1 / Route 2 and single / multiple applications

Single / multiple

If you are applying for **more than one school**, you need to complete this section for each school you are applying for.

You must:

- Describe in the Word application form the steps you have taken to search for suitable sites and what sites (if any) are available in the local area
- Detail in the Word application form any sources of funding available to you to support site acquisition
- Complete the Excel application form with details of your preferred sites. For each site, you are asked for:
 - your reasons for choosing it
 - the address and postcode
 - an outline of its current use
 - details of the current freeholder
 - a brief description of the site including size (in square metres)
 - an outline of its availability and the nature of the tenure
 - an explanation of why it is suitable for your school and how it will support delivery of your education vision

You should make enquiries as to whether your preferred sites are available for acquisition or leasehold but you must not enter into any negotiations at this or any other stage. If your application is approved, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) will undertake negotiations to acquire a site for your school.

We will make an overall cost and value for money assessment of your preferred site. You should therefore aim for the lowest possible capital costs and be as flexible as possible in your site requirements.

We do not expect to provide capital funding to independent schools that do not plan to create additional places. If you wish to expand provision as an independent school, we will consider whether capital funding may be made available. Decisions will be made on a case by case basis with strong supporting evidence required.

If, after approval of your application it proves impossible to identify a feasible site, we may have to delay the opening of your school or, in some cases, we may not be able to open your school at all.

You will be in the strongest possible position if you have identified a number of feasible sites at the application stage.

Annex A – completing the budget planning spreadsheet

The budget planning spreadsheet is a tool to help you to demonstrate that the education plan and staffing structure proposed throughout the application is affordable within the funding available from the Education Funding Agency. It is important that it is consistent with the rest of the application, that you use it to demonstrate how your plans will be made a reality and that your assumptions clearly show what strategic financial decisions you have made. You will be asked to update this tool as your plans develop throughout the pre-opening phase.

Your Excel spreadsheet will contain a number of tabs. The first two tabs (sections A and B) ask you to fill out basic information about your group and your proposed school. Please fill out these two tabs first because the information you provide (e.g. pupil numbers, local authority) will populate the other worksheets and this will save you time. This also means if you choose the wrong local authority in section B this will affect the accuracy of your financial plans using the budget planning tool.

Budget planning tool

Forecasts should be prepared on an academic year (September to August) basis. Please enter unrounded amounts [e.g. £15,750] when completing the worksheets. The budget planning tool automatically calculates indicative levels of funding based on the information you enter. The actual funding that a school will receive in a given academic year will not be established until closer to opening and projects that progress to pre-opening will be asked to complete revised budget plans before the Department enters into a funding agreement. However, at this stage it is important that you show your team can prepare complete financial plans using the budget planning tool. This allows us to assess whether the proposed school is affordable and whether your trust has the capability to develop a robust and balanced plan.

You must provide financial information up to and including the academic year after the school is full. The latest that AP Free Schools should be full is from the beginning of the fourth year. If the proposal is for an existing provider that does not intend to expand, it is not necessary to provide more than three years of plans.

You should refer to the **Academies Financial Handbook** in planning your budget. For example, forecasts should be prepared on the 'accruals' basis of accounting, which means that you should recognise expenditure in the accounting period in which it is incurred, which may be earlier than when the invoice is actually paid.

Budget

Budget assumptions should be listed throughout this sheet at column P and should be consistent with the information provided in the rest of your application. You should include references to show the sources of evidence and benchmarking information used.

Assumptions made could include the following:

- Pupil numbers are assumed to vary between 80% and 120% of average full-time equivalent (FTE) attendance during the year.
- The local authority has confirmed that they would be prepared to pay £6,000 per academic year (on top of the £8,000 per place funding the school will receive) for a full time place for a child who requires behavioural intervention.

These are just some examples of the kind of assumptions that you will want to consider including. For each line of income and expenditure you will want to think about whether additional commentary is needed to help the Department understand how you have derived numbers or to highlight where approximations have been used.

Section 1 - Pupil Numbers

Pupil numbers in each cell throughout the spreadsheet should be the full-time equivalent (FTE) averaged over the academic year (for instance if you plan to have 80 children attend for 1 day a week for a full academic year, that is 16 full-time equivalent pupils).

Please enter all FTE places for Key Stage 1 (Years Reception to 2) in row 9, Key Stage 2 (Years 3-6) in row 10, Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) in row 11, and Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11) in row 12.

Commissioners (schools, academies and local authorities) will provide top-up funding above this base level to cover the total cost of provision. This top-up funding will be paid in or close to the real-time movement of the pupil, and will flow directly between the commissioner and the provider. Please enter the average rate you have agreed with commissioners for the key stages that you will cater for in rows 14-17.

Post-16 pupils will not receive base funding of £8k but will receive an allocation of mainstream per-student funding calculated by the national 16-19 funding formula. All providers will receive an allocation of additional support funding of £6,000 for each high needs student placed with them. In the first year, high needs will be determined by the local authority and beyond that will be calculated using student numbers from the last full academic year. Schools may also receive top-up funding, based on the student's

assessed needs, from the commissioner to meet the needs of each student placed in the institution. You should enter these details into rows 20-23.

Any 16-19 year old pupils not referred by commissioners will be funded at the mainstream level. The 16-19 rates per pupil will be calculated for you when you select your local authority on the cover sheet. An individual 16-19 pupil cannot receive both commissioner-led and EFA funding streams at the same time so should only be entered once, but it is possible to have both funding streams active at the same time as long as they are for different pupils.

You will need to provide supporting material showing evidence of your commissioners' (local authorities, schools or Academies) willingness to pay your rates for pre-16 (and any post-16) pupils they refer for this stage of your application.

Section 2 - Income

This worksheet will automatically generate an estimate of grant funding income, including ESG.

Additional funding:

Education Services Grant – free schools receive a flat rate grant of £140 per pupil to cover the cost of services previously provided by the local authority.

Insurance Grant - free schools will receive a grant of £20 per pupil calculated automatically based on pupil numbers. It is assumed that the school's local formula funding provides an additional average of £25 per pupil to cover insurance costs. If there is a significant shortfall between the cost of building insurance and the £45 per pupil (£25 + £20 as above) that the school is assumed to receive then the EFA may provide you with a top-up insurance grant to cover the difference (it is not expected that any school will need to claim this once full).

Business Rates – free schools receive a grant from the EFA to cover the full cost of business rates at the discounted charity rate. **Row 47 will be populated once you have provided details of the rates in row 105.**

Where a child who receives additional funding (for instance Free School Meals or Service Children Premium) is referred to an AP free school, it will be for the AP free school and commissioner to ensure that that funding follows the child. This should be built into the commissioned rate and should not form a separate income stream.

Other Income - If you expect income from sources other than the EFA please include

them in your budget sheet. You should use the assumptions column (column P) to provide robust evidence on why it is realistic and achievable to assume the levels of income you have included. Any additional income would usually be used to enhance, extend, and enrich the school's offer or to save towards capital projects and should not be fundamental to the operation of the school. Schools are expected to be viable on the basis of their EFA income against projected costs.

Post-Opening Grant - The curriculum materials (books and equipment) element (rows 60-61) will be calculated automatically using your pupil number entries. You will receive this grant for any new pupils you take each year.

The leadership grant for alternative provision free schools (row 62) will be negotiated on a case by case basis with your lead contact during the pre-opening period. You should enter the amount of leadership grant you think you will need up to the point you have pupils in each year group. The actual leadership grant you receive will depend on your planned build-up. Independent schools will not normally be eligible for a leadership grant and should therefore not enter anything into row 60.

Mainstream leadership grant rates are available as a guide in the revenue funding guidance: www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/freeschools/b00222077/pre-opening/revenue

Section 3 - Expenditure

Please enter your expenditure total under the headings: Other Staff, Premises, Educational Resources, Professional Services and Other expenditure. We have suggested some areas where we would expect to see expenditure listed. Staff costs will be calculated automatically once the 'Staff' worksheet is completed.

It is sensible to include costs associated with depreciation of assets, excluding land and buildings. This is where items such as laptops or minibuses (but not day-to-day items) will need to be replaced. As an example, a good financial plan using the budget planning tool might show that there is a need to buy more laptops in the third year, then replace other assets in the fifth year. These assumptions should be reflected in column Q. We would expect contingency to be around 1% of overall income.

The DfE website includes [schools benchmarking](#) information and [academies' spend data](#). These provide details of the non-staff costs typically incurred by maintained schools and academies. The benchmarking information on the schools benchmarking website does not cover the costs of purchasing and providing services that an academy or free school will need which would be provided by a local authority to its maintained schools. You can

access information on the schools benchmarking website by using the 'Guest Login' link.

Staff

The information you enter here should match the staffing model included in your main application form. Please provide details of the position, type of position, salary, allowance, pension rate and National Insurance rate in columns C-G. Columns H-O require you to input a number 0-1 setting out the full time equivalence of that role depending on whether the member of staff is full or part time. Each member of staff needs to be entered in a separate row. An example is available at the top of the sheet.

You can find out who your local government pension scheme manager is [here](#). You should contact the relevant fund manager in the first instance to get a likely estimate of the rate in your area.

National Insurance is not a fixed rate and varies with earnings. For further information visit the HMRC website [here](#).

Education support staff are non-teachers who have an active role in supporting the education of pupils. They can include: teaching assistants, high level teaching assistants, learning support assistants for pupils with high levels of SEN or who have EAL, nursery nurses, modern language assistants, instructors, lab technicians, coaches, sports coaches, mentors, family support workers etc. Education support staff are separate from school administration staff.

You should visit the [schools benchmarking website](#) and the [academies spend website](#) to get an idea of how much maintained schools and academies spend on staffing costs. You should explain in your assumptions how you have taken these benchmarks into account when setting the level of spend on staffing costs for your school. Where a financial plan using the budget planning tool indicates that a significantly greater or lesser proportion of the school budget will be spent on staffing than typical, we would expect the financial section of the application form to set out clearly why this is appropriate for your school.

Summary

This sheet will provide you with a breakdown of your funding allocation, your pupil and staff numbers, staff structure as well as giving you a set of financial ratios on strands of your expenditure against overall costs. Cells will be red rated where your ratios and allocated spending are greater than we might expect to see. This is a guide to help you think through your plans and you can provide any notes or reasoning in column P.



Department
for Education

© Crown copyright 2013

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence or email psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.

This document is available for download at www.education.gov.uk

Reference: DFE-00101-2013