



Department  
for Education

# **Schools, central school services and high needs NFF modelling: quality assurance note**

**December 2016**

# Schools, central school services and high needs NFF modelling: quality assurance note

## Introduction

1. This document provides information on the quality assurance processes applied to the models used to calculate the illustrative allocations under the proposed schools, central school services and high needs national funding formulae (NFF). It sets out how these processes meet the guidelines described in the Aqua Book guidance on producing quality analysis for government.

## Description

2. Three spreadsheet models are used to produce the illustrative allocations for the three NFFs. The models use a wide range of input datasets, as explained in the published technical notes. These include aggregate data on pupil characteristics for individual schools as provided by local authorities (LAs) to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) on their 2016-17 Authority Proforma Tool returns, and dedicated schools grant baselines for each funding block in 2016-17, also provided by LAs to the EFA.
3. The proposed NFF arrangements are described in the consultation, with more detail on the specific calculations conducted by the models in the technical notes. The aim of the models is to calculate the funding that LAs, and individual mainstream maintained schools and academies for the schools NFF, would receive in the first year of the NFF based on their 2016-17 pupil data, and their funding if the proposed NFF had been fully implemented in 2016-17 without transitional protections being applied.

## Why the models are business critical

4. The models are not being used to distribute any funding to LAs and schools. However, they are illustrating the potential impact of the proposed NFF arrangements set out in the consultation, so are critical for enabling ministers, officials and consultation respondents to understand and scrutinise the implications of the consultation's proposals on school and LA funding.

## Summary of quality assurance

5. The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) had overall responsibility for the NFF models and their development. The Analytical Assurer had responsibility for the design and delivery of the quality assurance process. There were the following

strands to the quality assurance:

- Policy decisions, assumptions and data inputs: The SRO signed off the models' technical specifications and the analysts demonstrated to policy leads how each policy decision was applied in the model. The models' data inputs were sense checked and assurance was provided by the relevant senior civil servant.
  - Validation: Analysts talked through the models with the relevant policy leads to show that the methodologies of the proposed NFFs were being applied correctly;
  - Verification: The lead analysts undertook a variety of technical checks to ensure the models work as intended. An independent analyst seconded from the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) built their own NFF models based on the technical specification and the results were checked against the models built by Department for Education analysts to ensure that identical illustrative allocation amounts were obtained; and
  - Scrutiny: Sign off meetings were arranged with the SRO, analytical assurer, the department's Chief Analyst, and the relevant director general and directors, to scrutinise the quality assurance process.
6. The models were not formally externally audited, but as noted above dual-build models were produced by an analyst from GAD. This provided a robust external challenge to the department's modelling calculations and effectively provided much of the challenge that would arise from a more formal audit.

## Approach to quality assurance

Element of quality assurance	Undertaken
Developer testing	<b>Yes</b>
Internal peer review	<b>Yes</b>
External peer review	<b>Yes</b>
Use of version control	<b>Yes</b>
Internal audit	<b>No</b>
Quality assurance guidelines	<b>Yes</b>
External audit	<b>No</b>
Governance	<b>Yes</b>
Transparency (published results)	<b>Yes</b>



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