



Department
for Education

A guide to new special free school revenue funding 2020 to 2021

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Introduction

1. This guide sets out how revenue funding for new special free schools will be calculated and paid based upon funding rates for the 20/21 academic year. It is primarily aimed at free schools opening in the 2020/21 academic year. However, it will also be a useful guide for schools opening in future years. And those applying to open a free school through application waves running during 2020 to 21 academic year. It is important to note that funding may change annually.
2. This guide also sets out the importance of good financial health and the financial governance and accountability requirements for trusts. A pre-opening financial management and governance self-assessment is available at Annex A, and is a helpful tool for trusts to assess a free school's financial governance and compliance prior to opening.
3. The following funding will be available to special free schools upon opening:
 - per-place (FTE) funding
 - commissioner top-up funding
 - business rates grant
 - teachers pay grant
 - teachers' pension employer contribution grant
 - universal infant free school meals
 - PE and sport premium
 - post-opening grant

Each is described in more detail later in this guide.

4. The guide does not cover:
 - funding for mainstream or alternative provision free schools, for which separate guides are available
 - funding for hospital education
 - free schools open before September 2020 (who will be receiving updates on future funding arrangements from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA))
 - any initial funding which may be provided by the department to help free school proposers to develop their projects before the opening of the school (e.g. project development grant). Further information on [project development grant](#) (PDG) is available on [gov.uk](#)
 - capital funding, which will depend on the circumstances of individual free schools (and within this is any ongoing annual costs of leasing premises)
 - Value Added Tax (VAT) open academies and free schools do not receive a separate grant to cover these costs, but will instead be able to claim back, when open, any VAT paid in respect of their non-commercial activity, directly from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) via the VAT scheme for academies

School resource management and planning overview

School resource management

5. Effective schools make the best use of resources, ensuring that every pound is used to have maximum impact for their pupils and the school. Schools that do this well tend to:
 - base their financial planning on delivering educational outcomes, rather than as a separate consideration
 - have a strategic approach towards financial planning for the longer term (3 to 5 years)
 - deploy their staff effectively and efficiently, linked to their long-term plan
 - have robust challenge from financially skilled governors and head teachers
 - have skilled staff responsible for managing finances, who have experience of seeking best value for money when procuring
 - have transparent financial systems and processes that encourage constructive challenge within and between schools
6. The [school resource management strategy](#) offers practical support and guidance for schools and academies to help them reduce costs on regular purchases and recruitment costs so that they can invest their resources into areas that make the most difference to pupil outcomes.
7. It includes [recommended deals](#) which can help schools save money on regular purchases such as:
 - printers, photocopiers and IT equipment;
 - Schools Switch, an energy comparison service for schools, to ensure they are getting the best deal;
 - the [Risk Protection Arrangement](#), to save money on insurance;
 - The supply teacher and agency worker deal which makes fees and mark-ups transparent and removes the temp-to-perm fee.
8. There are also a range of tools [to support better resource management including the financial benchmarking service](#), which allow schools to compare their spending patterns to schools in similar circumstances, and the department's [Teaching Vacancies site](#) allows schools to advertise their vacancies for free.
9. There is also [support with strategic financial planning](#) and [guidance on financial efficiency, with curriculum planning](#) available to help school leadership teams, including a [curriculum planning tool](#)
10. The ['school resource management: top 10 planning checks for governors'](#) guidance contains information to help schools manage their resources efficiently to deliver good educational outcomes. In particular, trusts will want to use the key

metrics contained within the planning checks to consider the affordability and value of their proposed curriculum and staffing plans.

11. To receive regular updates about the school resource management tools, support and guidance, schools can sign up to the department's [schools business professionals contact list](#).

Financial planning

12. Free schools should plan their expenditure using the most up to date [financial template](#) to ensure that it is affordable within the funding provided. This should be an on-going process with financial plans updated as plans for the school are more fully developed, staff are appointed, site plans are developed and other costs are more firmly established. Groups should also refresh financial plans as further details of funding arrangements are confirmed, and review them regularly to ensure they reflect the likely number of pupils based on the number of applications. In doing this, they will want to make sure they are aware of funding arrangements for each new academic year.
13. For local authority presumption free schools, the local authority and trust are required to determine the minimum viable number of the school; i.e. the minimum number of pupils required in order to be financially viable. The department expects local authorities to provide sustainable underwriting arrangements for presumption schools in support of the pupil forecasts agreed between the trust and the local authority.
14. If applying to open a free school you may be required to complete a financial plan for the proposed school. All applications, including those with an innovative or new approach, must demonstrate that the school will be financially viable. You can find the full criteria against which we will judge financial viability of free school applications in the [how to apply guide](#).
15. Free schools in pre-opening will be asked to share their current financial plans with the department before entering into a funding agreement. This should include a version modelled around the minimum number of pupils required in order to deliver an educationally and financially viable offer.
16. Financial plans will need to be resubmitted ahead of the school's readiness-to-open meeting (ROM) and should be based on the latest available number of accepted offers.
17. Please note that at post-16, an adjustment of at least -30% should be applied to take account of the potential difference between accepted offers and students who register, as students are able to hold multiple offers. It should also be noted that not all 16 to 19 students progress from Year 12 to Year 13; this drop-off can be typically around 15%. The details included in this plan will be used in order for draft funding statements to be issued.
18. Projects should be ready to submit their plans with evidence to underpin their pupil number assumptions which must be realistic and achievable. The department will want to see that as far as possible the plans reflect the school's income based on the best estimates of available grants, the school's outgoings

and the likely number of pupils. Plans should show that the school will not go into deficit at any point.

19. Plans should be based on the most up-to-date available estimates of grant funding. The free school [financial template](#) containing 2020/21 funding rates is available on GOV.UK and will calculate indicative GAG funding using the up-to-date funding rates.

Annual revenue funding for special free schools

20. Once the school is open, funding will be calculated and paid in the school's first year by ESFA and by the local authorities commissioning places at the free school. Special free schools may also receive funding from local authorities and other schools or academies for commissioned services – for example to provide specialist teaching support for pupils in local schools.
21. Special free schools are established in response to demand from local authorities, and their support is essential. Evidence of demand for the school would have been needed to support the establishment of the school.
22. Funding in special free schools comprises:
 - per-place funding for all places for pre-16 and 16 to 19 pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans; and
 - top-up funding for each pupil placed in the free school
23. The fixed per-place funding will be paid for a number of places which will be subject to regular review. The per-place rate will be £10,000 in 2020/21, and may be subject to change in subsequent years.
24. The top-up funding comes from the local authority commissioning the place, and is determined by the local authority in negotiation with the free school based on the pupil's assessed needs and the cost of meeting those needs in the school. This top-up funding is paid for as long as the pupil attends the school, and will flow directly between the local authority and the special free school.
25. Pupils without EHC plans can only be admitted to special schools in certain circumstances. Please refer to the [SEND code of practice](#) and your funding agreement for further details.
26. Special free schools' continuing financial viability depends on the ongoing support of local authorities, both in terms of a commitment to commission placements, and their willingness to provide associated top-up funding.
27. Place funding for the first year is based upon evidence provided in pre-opening of the estimated number of FTE places required for the number of pupils attending the free school. Evidence of commissioned places will have to be provided to the department during pre-opening.
28. As of 2019/20, funding for special free schools is included in local authorities' high needs allocations, as explained in [changes to special free school funding 2019/20](#). The number of places to be funded at special free schools from their second year of opening onwards will be agreed with the local authority through

the place change notification process. Local authority support is therefore very important to the school's future viability.

Pupil premium

29. The pupil premium is a grant to provide schools with extra money to meet local challenges, chiefly those that may arise from deprivation. It is not a personal budget for pupils (like SEND funding) and carries no individual entitlements. Schools should assess the needs of all their eligible pupils and spend the pupil premium budget to meet those needs appropriately; some will need less expensive support, some will need more intensive support.
30. Schools receive the following funding for each pupil registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the last 6 years:
 - £1,320 for pupils in reception to year 6
 - £935 for pupils in year 7 to year 11
31. Schools also receive £2,300 for each pupil who has left local authority care through adoption, a special guardianship order, a child arrangements order or a residence order. If a pupil has registered as eligible for free school meals and has also left local authority care for one of these reasons, they will attract the £2,300 rate.
32. Pupil premium payments are made to academies and free schools in quarterly instalments. A school's pupil premium allocation is calculated from the information it submits in the January schools census. Allocations are applied from the start of the next financial year (April), paid in arrears so schools receive the first payment in June. Allocations are updated in December 2020 for pupils who are eligible for free school meal and who are also looked after using the latest looked after children data and in March 2021 for schools that are new and growing by comparing both January 2021 and Oct 2020 census data.
33. The pupil premium allocation for a new free school opening in September 2020 will be based on the January 2021 census; payments are made quarterly in arrears with the first payment received in June.
34. Local authorities receive the same amount for each looked-after child in their care, to be spent on their personal education plan in consultation with the child's school.
35. There is more information on the [pupil premium](#) on gov.uk, including an explanation of the accountability requirements.
36. Children from service families attract a separate grant – the service premium, currently £300 per head. This has no connection with disadvantage - it is paid from the same budget for convenience and is solely for the pastoral support of children whose parents are or were in the armed forces. More information about the [service premium](#) is available on [gov.uk](#).

Teachers pay grant

37. In 2019, the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) recommended a 2.75% uplift to the minima and maxima of all pay ranges and allowances, and we accepted the

recommendations in full. The recommended award is 0.75% over the 2% we assessed that schools can afford on average at a national level. In recognition of the difference, we invested a further £105 million into the teachers' pay grant in 2019-20, on top of the £321 million that schools received in 2019/20 to implement the residual 2018/19 pay award.

38. We are providing approximately £500 million per year from 2020/21 to maintain this support with respect to the 2018 and 2019 teachers' pay awards. We intend to include this funding within the core funding schools receive as part of their national funding formulae (NFF) allocations by April 2021 for maintained schools, and September 2021 for academies.

39. Further information on the [Teacher's Pay Grant is available here](#).

Teachers' pension employer contribution grant

40. The teachers' pension employer contribution grant provides additional funding to schools, to cover the cost of the increase in the employer contribution rate of the Teachers' Pension Scheme from 16.4% to 23.6% from September 2019.

41. We will continue to provide the grant to maintained schools until March 2021, and academies/free schools until August 2021. We intend to include funding for pensions within the core funding schools receive as part of their national funding formulae (NFF) allocations by April 2021 for maintained schools, and September 2021 for academies.

42. Detailed information on the grant is available [here](#), and further information on the 2020/21 allocations will be published in the autumn 2020.

43. New free schools (opening in September 2020) will not appear on the census data which is being used. The grant allocation which these schools will receive between September 2020 and March 2021 will be based on a minimum funding allocation based on a minimum level of:-

- 100 pupils for mainstream schools
- 40 places for high needs institutions

44. The new schools will receive an updated allocation in spring 2021 based on their October 2020 pupil numbers. This will cover the September 2020 to March 2021 period. Schools that were not fully open in October 2020 and are still growing by adding year groups, will also receive an updated allocation in spring 2021 to reflect that growth. Further details of these updates will be included alongside the spring 2021 allocations.

45. Additional information on the grant is available [here](#). Further information on the 2020/21 rates and allocations will be published in due course.

Risk protection arrangement (RPA)

46. Risk protection arrangement (RPA) is an alternative to commercial insurance, whereby government funds cover any losses that arise. The RPA will cover losses that are in scope of the [RPA membership rules](#).

47. The RPA membership year runs from 1 September to the following 31 August, however members can join at any time. Please note, free schools can join the RPA scheme and receive cover prior to opening; there is no cost or premium to join the RPA in pre-opening. Free schools in the pre-opening stage, should have discussions with their lead contact regarding RPA and inform them if they require opting in to the RPA scheme at an early stage.
48. Once a school is open, ESFA will deduct the per pupil cost at source from the free school's general annual grant (GAG). The cost of RPA will be £18 per pupil.
49. Free schools do not have to enter the scheme and are free to make their own alternative insurance arrangements; however, there will be no additional funding provided should extra costs be incurred. More information on [RPA](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

Business rates grant

50. Free schools pay business rates at the 80% discounted charitable rate. They will receive a grant to cover the actual costs paid. This needs to be claimed via the [online form](#) on <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/charitable-rate-relief>.

Universal infant free school meals (UIFSM)

51. State-funded schools in England are required by law to provide free lunches to infant pupils (in reception, Year 1 and Year 2) who are not otherwise entitled to benefits-related free school meals.
52. Schools receive £437 for each of the eligible pupils, which is the equivalent of £2.30 per day for a school year for each of the eligible pupils. In their first year of opening, free school meals will initially be funded based on the estimates of the pupil numbers used to issue their indicative funding letter.
53. Schools will receive an initial provisional payment in October based on these estimates and the average UIFSM take up rate in their local authority. Adjustments to reflect actual pupil numbers will be made in July, based upon meal take up to date from the October and January schools' census. The July payment will also include an additional allocation for the first 2 terms of the next academic year.

PE and sport premium

54. Free schools with primary age pupils receive [PE and sport premium](#) funding from ESFA, based on the number of pupils in years 1 to 6. This grant is for a specific purpose, and will be paid separately to the GAG funding. Schools must use the funding to make additional and sustainable improvements to the quality of physical education (PE), physical activity and sport they offer.
55. Open school allocations are based on the January schools census (for example January 2020 census for the 2020/21 academic year). For new schools or a

school teaching eligible pupils for the first time in the academic year 2020/21, funding will be based on the data from the October 2020 school census. For free schools opening in September 2020, the funding would be based on the data from the October census and the first payment would be paid to the school in the following March 2021, with the second payment paid in May 2021.

56. The free school will receive PE and sport premium funding for a new academic year from the ESFA in two separate payments. These are:-

- 7/12 of the funding allocation in November 2020
- 5/12 of the funding allocation in May 2021

57. Further information [on PE and sports premium is available here](#)

Post-opening grant (POG)

58. Special free schools (with the exception of LA presumption free schools) are provided with a post-opening grant to reflect the additional costs in establishing a new publicly-funded school which cannot be met through the GAG. The POG provides funding in two elements as the free school grows: non-staffing resources, paid on a per place basis, and a leadership grant. These titles reflect the basis on which the funding is calculated, but the grant can be spent on any legitimate purpose of the school.

59. The first element (resources) is paid each year that the school builds up to capacity for each new place the school is *expected* to create. It is based on the final finance plan submitted before opening and is not revisited to reflect actual place numbers. It is paid at the following rates:

- £250 for each new place created in the primary phase (years R to 6)
- £500 for each new place created in the secondary and 16 to 19 phases (years 7 to 13)

60. The second element (leadership) is a fixed-rate payment of £170,000 (50% in the first year; 30% in the second; and 20% in the third).

61. The resource element of POG is paid over the first 3 months of the academic year, with 50% paid in month 1, 25% in month 2 and 25% in month 3.

62. The leadership element of POG is paid monthly.

63. Free schools set up through the local authority presumption route are not eligible for POG. They should liaise with the local authority to agree what, if any, post opening/diseconomies funding the local authority will provide when the school opens.

Financial governance and accountability

64. Trusts will need to ensure that spending decisions are transparent and in the school's best interests and should not give rise to criticism of the trust by Parliament, and/or the public, and/or the media. Free schools will need sound financial procedures, the capacity to handle public money, and good governance arrangements. On opening, free schools will need to have a robust framework to

manage its funding and ensure proper accountability and procedures are maintained.

The Academies' Financial Handbook

65. The [Academies' Financial Handbook](#), together with the funding agreement, sets out the financial management and governance requirements for academy trusts.
66. Trusts must comply with the handbook throughout the pre-opening period and once open. This is outlined within the grant agreements underlying any funding you receive from the department and/or ESFA. Non-compliance with the handbook is considered a breach of contract and may trigger various sanctions.
67. The handbook includes requirements in relation to financial oversight, financial planning, internal control, financial monitoring and management and proper and regular use of public funds as well as a number of other specific matters. The handbook also sets out the audit requirements for academy trusts.
68. The handbook is aimed at trustees, accounting officers (principals and chief executives), principal finance officers (finance directors and business managers), clerks to the board of trustees, local governing bodies of multi-academy trusts and auditors.
69. The handbook clearly articulates that the accounting officer is personally responsible to Parliament, and to the accounting officer of ESFA, for the resources under their control. This personal responsibility extends to ensuring regularity, propriety and value for money. The accounting officer also has responsibilities for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for the management of opportunities and risks.

Financial statements

70. Free schools, **including those in the pre-opening phase**, with a signed funding agreement must submit audited financial statements to ESFA, for each year ending 31 August, by 31 December. The [Academies Accounts Direction](#) prescribes the form and content of the financial statements. Prior to signing the funding agreement financial statements should be prepared in accordance with company law.
71. Trusts should set their [accounting reference date](#) to 31 August at Companies House. This is the date to which their financial statements will be produced.
72. The accounts must also be filed by 31 May (i.e. within 9 months of the end of the accounting period) with Companies House. Further information can be found on the [Companies House website](#).

Other financial returns

73. Trusts must also submit the following financial returns to ESFA once open:
 - Budget forecast return submitted to ESFA by 31 July or 6 weeks after receiving the final funding letter, whichever is the later

- Academies accounts return due where the free school did not prepare audited accounts at 31 August but had opened by 31 March, or where the free school did prepare accounts at 31 August but has opened between 1 September and 31 March. The return must be submitted to ESFA by 31 May in the first year only. Subsequent returns will be for the year ending 31 August and must be submitted to ESFA by 31 January
- Land and buildings valuation return new free schools should complete the [land and buildings valuation online form](#) within 6 weeks of opening. This allows DfE to produce desktop valuations of the land and buildings of all new academies. ESFA will send academies that opened in the year between 1 September and 31 August a copy of the desktop valuation in the following January. The copy is for information only.
- [Financial management and governance self-assessment](#) submitted to ESFA within four months of opening. The self-assessment highlights the main requirements academies must have in place soon after opening. A pre-opening self-assessment is available at Annex A, and is a helpful tool for trusts to assess a free school's financial governance and compliance prior to opening

74. Trusts are responsible for keeping up to date with the latest deadlines and requirements. More [information about academies financial returns](#) are available on GOV.UK.

75. Trusts can also keep up to date through the ESFA [Update](#).

ESFA Information Exchange

76. ESFA Information Exchange is a secure website, accessible via the department's secure access system. It enables academies to use:

- Document Exchange to receive and exchange documents with ESFA
- Help Centre to provide support and advice on using Information Exchange
- Calendar to check key business cycle dates and deadlines
- Digital forms for accurate financial returns and other transactions

77. A secure access account for new free schools will be automatically set up using information shared from Get Information About Schools (GIAS), the department's register of educational establishments. This usually happens within 2 weeks of opening. Prior to a free school opening, ESFA will send an email to the secure access approver of the free school who will then be able to activate the account and add up to 7 end users to use secure access and have access to ESFA Information Exchange.

Further information

78. Further information on academies revenue funding is available on [the ESFA pages](#) on GOV.UK.

Annex A – Pre-opening financial management and governance self-assessment

This self-assessment is comprised of questions from the [financial management and governance self-assessment \(FMGS\)](#). The requirements in the FMGS checklist apply from the date on which the funding agreement was signed, so it is a helpful tool for trusts to assess a free school's financial governance and compliance prior to opening. The self-assessment must be completed in full and sent to ESFA within four months of opening.

1. Has the board appointed a principal or chief executive?
2. Has the trust permanently designated only one senior executive leader (principal or chief executive) as the accounting officer?
3. Have the directors/trustees been provided with the information for them to fully discharge their duties as company directors and charity trustees to undertake their roles effectively?
4. Does the accounting officer, under the guidance of the board, ensure appropriate oversight of financial transactions;
 - by having all the trust's property under the control of the trustees
 - having measures in place to prevent losses or misuse
 - having bank accounts, financial systems and financial records operated by more than one person
 - keeping and maintaining full and accurate accounting records
 - preparing accruals accounts, giving a true and fair view of the trust's use of resources, in accordance with existing accounting standards?
5. Does the board have arrangements in place to meet at least 3 times per year and conduct business only when meetings are quorate?
6. Does the trust prepare management accounts every month, including budget variance reports, cash flow forecasts and information on cash, debtors and creditors?
7. Are management accounts shared with the chair of trustees every month and other trustees 6 times a year?
8. Has the board made arrangements to consider information about the financial performance of the trust when it meets? This must be at least 3 times a year.
9. Does the trust have an individual in place discharging the role of chief financial officer, with appropriate qualifications and/or experience?
10. Has the board approved a written scheme of delegation of financial powers that maintains robust internal control arrangements?
11. Has the board of trustees approved a balanced budget and minuted its approval?
12. If a deficit revenue budget was set, was ESFA informed within 14 days?

13. Has the trust submitted all relevant budget returns as detailed in the [Academies Financial Handbook](#) by the relevant deadline?
14. Has the board been made aware of the [Academies Financial Handbook](#) requirements when making investments?
15. Has the trust implemented a risk management strategy which includes the regular review of its risk register by an appropriate committee of the board?
16. Has the board approved a whistleblowing policy?
17. Has the trust prepared a contingency and business continuity plan?
18. Has the trust established an appropriate internal control framework?
19. Is the trust a member of the department's risk protection arrangement (RPA) or does it have alternative, adequate insurance cover?
20. Has the board been informed of the requirement to obtain ESFA approval for the following transactions beyond the delegated limits as per the [Academies Financial Handbook](#)?
 - severance, compensation and ex-gratia payments
 - write-offs
 - indemnities acquisition and disposal of assets
 - leasing
21. Has the board been informed of the requirement to obtain ESFA approval for the following transactions?
 - novel, contentious and repercussive transactions
 - borrowing
22. Has the board been informed that goods or services provided by individuals or organisations related to the trust must be provided at 'no more than cost', on the basis of an open book agreement and supported by statements of assurance, in accordance with the conditions set out in the [Academies Financial Handbook](#)?
23. Does the trust have procurement controls ensuring that:
 - spending has been for the purpose intended and there is probity in the use of public funds
 - spending decisions represent value for money
 - internal delegation levels exist and are applied within the trust
 - a competitive tendering policy is in place and applied, and Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) procurement thresholds are observed
 - relevant professional advice is obtained where appropriate?
24. Have all decision makers including the trustees, members, local governors of academies, if a multi-academy trust and senior employees, completed the trust's register of business and pecuniary interests?

25. Has the academy trust published on its website, its governing structure and remit and the relevant business and pecuniary interests of the accounting officer and members and trustees, including local governors where the trust is a MAT?
26. Does the trust have in place measures to manage any conflicts of interest?
27. Is the trust aware that they must report all transactions with related parties to ESFA in advance of the transaction taking place, using ESFA's on-line form? This requirement applies to transactions made on or after 1 April 2020
28. Is the trust aware that they must seek approval for transactions with related parties agreed on or after 1 April 2020 on or above the [Academies Financial Handbook](#) limits?
29. Do senior officers' payroll arrangements meet tax obligations fully?
30. Do decisions about executive pay follow a robust evidence-based process reflective of the individual's role and responsibilities, and that the board's approach to pay is transparent, proportionate and justifiable and in line with the [Academies Financial Handbook](#)?
31. Has the board been made aware of the requirement to prepare an annual report and accounts, which incorporates accounting policies which need to be approved by the board of trustees?
32. Has the board agreed the appointment of an external auditor for the trust?
33. Has the trust established a committee to provide assurance to the board about the suitability of, and compliance with financial systems and operational controls, and to ensure that risks are being adequately identified and managed? Trusts with annual income over £50m must have a dedicated audit committee for this. Other trusts can include this within another committee.
34. Has the audit committee or equivalent agreed and implemented a programme for the independent checking of financial controls and risks?
35. Does the trust have plans for this FMGS full return to be included in the programme for the independent checking of financial controls and risks
36. Has the board been informed of the requirement to report to ESFA any instances of fraud or theft above £5,000 against the trust, whether by employees, trustees or third parties, or where fraud is unusual or systematic in nature?



Department
for Education

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