



Department  
for Education

# **Completing the special free school 2021 to 2022 financial template**

**May 2021**

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## Introduction

1. The special free school financial template is a tool to help you to demonstrate that your education plan and staffing structure will be affordable within the funding available from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and commissioning local authorities. It is important that it is consistent with the rest of your plans, 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 need to update your financial plans on this template as your plans develop throughout the pre-opening phase.
2. We would encourage you to use the **checklist at the front of the template** before submitting financial plans to the department. The checklist highlights areas we commonly see incorrectly completed or overlooked resulting in delays in clearing plans.  
**It is important that you read the guidance in tab G1 before starting to populate the spreadsheet as it contains key information and advice.**
3. You may also find it useful to read the [guide to new special free school revenue funding](#) to further your understanding of how your funding is calculated.

## Completing the template

### Cover sheet

4. You will need to start by completing the cover sheet on tab G2 (for example, local authority, age range of school, capacity and opening date). The template will not work correctly if all relevant fields are not completed.

#### Proposition stage

5. If you are submitting your application to open a free school, please select 'Applicant group'. Once you have received approval to proceed to the next stage, you will need to refresh your plans at key points and should select 'Approved to pre-opening group'.

#### Local authority

6. It is important that you select the correct local authority to ensure your financial plans are based on the correct funding rates.
7. Some aspects of the funding calculations are based on rates and figures from the previous year (2020 to 21). The local authorities North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire did not exist in that year; in those cases the defunct Northamptonshire local authority is used for previous year calculations.

#### Proposed opening date

1. You may select a month of opening. If the month is any other than September, most income and expenditure calculations on the budget sheet will be pro-rata, depending on the number of months the school will be open in that academic year. For example, opening in December means the school will be open for 9 months of the year instead of 12, so funding amounts will be multiplied by a factor of 9/12.

#### Independent converter

8. We don't currently have any independent converter schools so this should always have 'no' selected in the drop-down box.

#### Risk protection arrangement (RPA)

9. Free schools are able to opt into a voluntary risk protection arrangement (RPA) offered by the government. This is £19 per place from 1 September 2021. The template will calculate the amount that will be deducted from your GAG to cover RPA: this will automatically be reflected as an expenditure line on the budget sheet.
10. You are able to arrange your own insurance if you prefer. However, you should note that there will be no extra funding available for this. Any insurance costs should be recorded in the expenditure section of the budget sheet. If you intend to opt out of RPA, you should select 'no' in the drop-down box on the cover sheet and let your delivery officer know your reasons for doing so.

11. Details of the [risk protection arrangements](#) are on GOV.UK.

## Pupil numbers sheet

12. You should enter the number of places in each year group, for each academic year. Place numbers in each cell throughout the spreadsheet should be the full-time equivalent (FTE) averaged over the academic year – for instance, 20 pupils attending on a FT basis and 50 pupils attending for three days a week: total  $20+30=50$  FTE places.
13. The template will highlight in blue which rows are relevant for your school type, and in grey those which are irrelevant. For example, if you chose “Primary” on the cover sheet, then the rows for reception through to year 6 will be shaded blue, while the rows for year 7 through to year 13 will be shaded grey. You should only type pupil figures into the rows which are relevant for your school type. Adding pupil places into year groups which are invalid for your school type may result in nonsensical results later in the template.
14. You will need to provide supporting material showing evidence of your local authorities’ willingness to pay your rates for places they commission for this stage of your application.

## Budget sheet

### Overview

15. The budget sheet shows the school’s indicative income and is to be used to plan your expenditure.
16. Forecasts should be prepared on an academic year (September to August) basis. The financial template automatically calculates indicative levels of funding based on the information you enter, using the 2021 to 2022 funding rates. The actual funding that a school will receive in a given academic year will not be established until closer to opening.
17. 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.
18. Budget assumptions must be consistent with the rest of your plans and should be detailed throughout this sheet in the ‘Assumptions/rationale’ column. Where relevant, you should include references to show the sources of evidence and benchmarking information used.
19. For example, assumptions made could include the following:

- Employer National Insurance and pension contributions are each calculated with regard to HMRC and relevant pension providers' guidance.
- The local authority has confirmed that they would be prepared to pay £XXX per academic year on top of the per-place funding the school will receive for a full-time place for a child who has moderate learning difficulty.
- Proposed teaching and non-teaching staff salaries are each benchmarked against other local schools.

20. 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 – FTE places**

21. FTE places by key stages will be automatically populated from the information you have provided on the pupil/place number sheet.

22. You will have negotiated with commissioners to provide top-up funding for each pupil placed in the free school, based on the pupil's assessed needs and the cost of meeting those needs in the school. Top-up funding comes from the local authority that commissions the place.

23. This top-up funding will be paid in or close to the real-time movement of the pupil and will flow directly between the local authority and the special free school. Please enter the average rate you have agreed with commissioners for the pre-16 key stages for which you will cater in the cells provided in Section 1 of the budget sheet.

### **Section 2 - Income**

24. All places for pre-16 and post-16 pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans in a special free school attract per-place funding of £10,000 per place. This amount will pre-populate in the template when you enter your place numbers on the pupil/place numbers sheet.

25. The income section will also automatically include any top-up funding that you have included in section 1.

26. Where the cover sheet has been completed to show that the school is opening part-way through the academic year (for example, January), the income is automatically pro-rata to reflect the proportion of the year that the school will be open.

### **Business rates**

27. Free schools receive a grant from the ESFA to cover the cost of business rates at the discounted charity rate. You should claim for this via the [online form](#) on GOV.UK. The

income section includes a row for 'ESFA rates grant'. This row will be populated automatically when you enter details of rates in the expenditure section (listed under 'Premises').

#### Additional ESFA/DfE funding

28. There is an additional section for manual entry of any additional grants the school may receive. Information on other grants is available in the [guide to new alternative provision free school funding](#). Where you choose to enter other grants, please use the boxes provided to include explanations of what assumptions you have made in calculating these.

#### Universal infant free school meals (UIFSM)

29. 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.

30. Profit should not be made from UIFSM, it is intended to be cost-neutral. Where funding for UIFSM is included in your plan, then the same amount of expenditure should also be included.

#### Other income

31. If you expect income from sources other than ESFA please include them in your budget sheet. You should use the assumptions/rationale column to provide 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 grant income against projected costs.

#### Post-opening grant (POG)

32. New special free schools receive additional funding, via POG to reflect the additional costs of establishing new publicly funded schools. The POG provides funding in 2 elements: per-pupil resources; and leadership grant. Please see the [guide to new special free school revenue funding](#) for further information.

33. The template automatically calculates the resource element based on the place numbers each year until the school reaches capacity. The second element (leadership) is a fixed-rate grant which will be pre-populated in the template.

#### **Budget sheet section 3 – Expenditure**

34. 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.

35. It is sensible to include costs associated with the replacement 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 the assumptions/rational column.
36. We would expect contingency to be around 1% of overall income.
37. The GOV.UK includes [schools benchmarking](#) information and [academies' spend data](#). These provide details of the 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.

## Staff sheet

38. The information you enter here should match your expected staffing model. Please provide details of the position, type of position, salary, allowance, pension rate in the respective columns and National Insurance (NI) category, from the drop-down list. Each member of staff needs to be entered in a separate row. An example is given at the top of the sheet.
39. You can find out who your local government pension scheme manager is on [the LGPS website](#). You should contact the relevant fund manager in the first instance to get a likely estimate of the rate in your area.
40. NI contributions are dependent on the employees NI category. Guidance on NI categories and rates is available [here](#).
41. Education support staff are non-teachers who have an active role in supporting the education of pupils. They can include: teaching assistants; learning support assistants for pupils with high levels of SEN or who have English as an additional language (EAL); nursery nurses; instructors; lab technicians; coaches; sports coaches; mentors; family support workers etc. Education support staff are separate from school administration staff.
42. The GOV.UK website includes [schools benchmarking](#) information and [academies' spend data](#). These provide details of the costs typically incurred by maintained schools and academies. 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 is typical, we would expect you to set out clearly why this is appropriate for your school.

## **Summary sheet**

43. This sheet provides some key summary information based on the information provided in the template including surpluses and deficits; staff/pupil ratios, income, expenditure, and average salaries. Certain cells will flag as red where your ratios and planned spending differ from what we might expect to see, this is intended as a guide only, and not a mandatory target. Please provide any notes or reasoning in the assumptions/rationale column.



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