



Department
for Education

Trust Capacity Fund

Information for applicants

July 2020

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1. Summary

1.1. About this guidance

This guidance, from the Department for Education (DfE), is for academy trusts, and good or outstanding Local Authority (LA) maintained [rural schools](#) forming a new multi-academy trust (MAT), who wish to apply for the 20-21 Trust Capacity Fund (TCaF). This guidance explains what TCaF is; the criteria applicants must meet to be eligible to apply for funding; and the criteria against which applications will be assessed.

If you wish to apply for funding, you should first familiarise yourself with the information in this document.

Throughout this document, 'DfE' and the 'Authority' refer to the Secretary of State for Education.

1.2. About the Trust Capacity Fund

TCaF 2020-21 is the successor programme to the 2019-20 fund, maintaining the same broad aim to provide additional funding to support the growth and development of existing academy trusts.^{1,2}

Alongside this, TCaF will also support good or outstanding LA maintained rural schools to convert and collaborate with partner schools to create new, strong MATs in areas of need.³

TCaF will award up to £17 million of funding over the 2020-21 financial year across five strands, each with their own eligibility criteria:

- A1: Support strong trusts to grow and innovate in areas of long-standing need.
- A2: Encourage strong trusts to grow by taking on and improving weaker maintained schools and academies.⁴
- B: Accelerate the development of mid-sized trusts with the potential to be strong
- C: Support the merger of smaller trusts to form new strong trusts, as well as priority projects from Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) which do not fall under the other strands.
- D: Support good or outstanding LA maintained rural schools to collaborate and create new, strong MATs.

¹ TCaF 2020-21 will be referred to as TCaF throughout the document.

² For TCaF 2020-21 funding, growth is defined as a trust taking on an additional school, not just a growth in capacity within an existing trust.

³ For TCaF 2020-21, rural refers to Rural Village and Rural Hamlet settings within the [Rural Urban Classification](#). Areas of need refers to areas which lack existing trust capacity, AEAs and opportunity areas.

⁴ Weaker schools refers to academies and maintained schools subject to intervention and departmental support, in accordance with the departments accountability principles.

1.3. Grant thresholds

The minimum and maximum grant values for each of the five strands of TCaF are set out below.

Strand	Minimum grant threshold	Maximum grant threshold
A1	£50,000	£310,000
A2	£50,000	£200,000
B	£50,000	£150,000
C	£50,000	£100,000
D	£50,000	£100,000

Table 1: TCaF grant thresholds

1.4. Activities not eligible for this fund

As the purpose of the grant is to strengthen the central capacity of trusts, rather than individual schools, the following activities are ineligible for funding from TCaF:

- activities that are solely focused on improving a single school within a trust, rather than the trust as a whole;
- capital expenditure, such as the purchase of assets (for example buildings, furniture, fittings, IT equipment, office refurbishment);
- any activities that the trust would otherwise be able to access free of charge;
- small amounts of time for pre-existing salaried staff (e.g. 1 hour of HR time);
- foreign travel;
- any activities that could be funded from other sources (e.g. legal fees that are covered by the sponsorship/conversion grant);
- any activities that took place prior to 6th April 2020;
- anything that could constitute state aid, as specified on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

For clarity, applicants applying for strand D **cannot** use funding to cover the legal costs for academy conversion.

The following activities **are considered as valid ‘growth’** for the purposes of determining eligibility to apply for TCaF funding:

- applications from schools to convert to academy status;
- sponsor matches for schools with directive Academy Orders;
- trust mergers, including a SAT joining a larger MAT and SATs joining to create new trusts;
- academy transfers from one trust to another; and

- approved free school bid proposals.

The following activities **are not considered as valid 'growth'** for the purposes of determining eligibility to apply for TCaF funding:

- significant change applications, such as increasing the age-range or published admissions number for a school within a trust;
- physically expanding an existing school within a trust;
- severance payments made as part of a re-structure;
- additional SEND units that are attached to an existing mainstream school; and
- a school joining the trust as an associate member only.

This is not an exhaustive list of ineligible activity and is merely intended to provide a basis for what is not eligible. If you are uncertain whether your proposed activity is suitable for TCaF funding, please seek guidance from your [RSC office](#).

1.5. Key dates and deadlines

TCaF will run across the 2020-21 financial year from **6th April 2020**. The application window will close on **31st December 2020**.

Applications for TCaF must be linked to a successful growth proposal, as defined in [section 1.4](#). We will consider growth applications that were approved by RSCs between February and December 2020. Growth proposals must be approved by the RSC **no later than 31st December 2020**.

The closing date to submit growth proposal applications will vary according to the date of the Head Teacher Board (HTB) you are submitting your proposal to. Please contact the relevant [RSC office](#) to confirm the deadline for submission.

Applicants should submit their TCaF application as soon as they are ready to do so and no later than the deadline given by your RSC office in advance of their HTB meeting in December 2020. Applications for TCaF can be assessed in advance of the accompanying RSC decision on the growth proposal at HTB, as detailed in [section 4](#). However, a final decision on the TCaF application will only be made following a positive RSC decision on the relevant growth proposal.

All funded activities in the TCaF application must start no **earlier than 6th April 2020** and **must be completed by 31st March 2021**.

Given this timetable, we recommend that applications are submitted well in advance of the closing date. Applicants must consider the deliverability of their proposed activities carefully, **especially when submitting an application that is close to the closing date for applications.**

TCaF is a competitive grant for the 2020-21 financial year with rolling moderation and assessment panels from July-December 2020. Early moderation panels ensure decisions can be made and communicated quickly to allow applicants to spend money within the timeframe for the fund. This means funds will deplete throughout the process, but the department will take steps to ensure funding is available to support growth projects that arise late in the year.

We would advise submitting your application as early as possible and, where this is not possible, that you keep RSCs informed as to your plans.

Applications for TCaF will be assessed regularly. The key dates and deadlines for the application process are set out in the table below.

Milestones	Dates
Publication of the TCaF application form and information for applicants	9th March 2020
Application window for TCaF opens	6th April 2020
Notify applicants of outcomes	July 2020 – January 2021
Deadline for growth proposals to be agreed for TCAF 20/21 application window	31st December 2020
Deadline for all funded activity to be completed	31st March 2021
Funding distributed to applicants (payment in arrears)	Throughout the funding period on completion of agreed activity
Deadline for all schools specified in growth proposal and TCaF application to be taken on.	31st March 2022

Table 2: Important dates for TCaF

2. Who can apply for TCaF?

2.1. Eligibility

All academy trusts are eligible to apply for TCaF funding under strands A-C unless they have an open Financial Notice to Improve (FNtI). The department's published [eligibility checker](#) for strands A-C will determine which strand each trust is eligible for. If you wish to apply for strands A-C of funding, you must:

- take at least one additional school into your trust;
- demonstrate how you plan to use the funding efficiently and effectively;
- be of sound financial health and, as a minimum requirement, not have an open FNtI; and
- in certain cases, you may be required to consent to a visit by a School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA).

Good or outstanding LA maintained rural schools are also eligible to apply for TCaF, through strand D of the fund.⁵ If you wish to apply for this strand you must:

- apply to convert to academy status;
- provide a clearly defined plan for growing your MAT, committing to take on at least 2 additional schools, who will submit a conversion application by 31st March 2021;
- demonstrate how you plan to use the funding efficiently and effectively; and
- agree to an SRMA visit to help establish the correct governance and finance at the outset of forming the new MAT.

Before submitting their TCaF application, applicants will have used the eligibility checker to check whether they are eligible to apply to the fund and under which strand. This eligibility checker summarises all the requirements for a trust to be eligible to apply for TCaF, as set out below.

Trusts should apply to the most appropriate strand for which they are eligible, in terms of the nature of their growth proposal. We strongly advise you speak to your RSC office before applying for TCaF, as they can advise you on the most suitable strand for your growth proposal.

Applicants can only submit one TCaF application per eligible growth proposal.

2.1.1. Eligibility for strands A1 and A2

You will be eligible to apply for these strands if you meet the following criteria:

- your trust consists of five or more schools;

⁵ For TCaF 2020-21 funding, rural refers to Rural Village and Rural Hamlet settings within the [Rural Urban Classification](#)

- your trust does not have an open FNtl;
- your trust meets the following standard in phonics:
 - per academy: either 75% converter academies at, or above, national average or 50% of converter & sponsored academies at, or above, national average.

Your trust must also meet a minimum of **at least two** of the following performance criteria:

- **School Improvement**

- **Directive Academy Order (dAO) academies:** 94% or more dAO academies have an improved Ofsted rating at first inspection with the trust.
- **Other academies:** 80% or more remain stable or improve with the trust **OR;**
- **as a trust:** has improved four or more DAO academies from inadequate to good or outstanding.

- **Progress**

- **per academy:** on average all schools remain in the same progress band or improve and any that are below average must have improved over the last three years; **OR**
- **as a trust:** published MAT progress is above average for Progress 8 and/or Progress in reading writing and maths.

- **English Baccalaureate (EBacc)**

- **per academy:** Either 75% of converter academies or 50% of converter & sponsored academies are above 34.7% (5% below national average) for EBacc entries and on an increasing trend for the last three years; **OR**
- **as a trust:** Published EBacc entries for the trust are above the national average.

2.1.2. Eligibility for strand B

You will be eligible to apply for this strand if you meet the following criteria:

- your trust consists of three or more schools
- your trust does not have an open FNtl

2.1.3. Eligibility for strand C

You will be eligible to apply for this strand if you meet the following criterion:

- your trust does not have an open FNtl

2.1.4. Eligibility for strand D

You will be eligible to apply for this strand as a lead school if you meet all of the following criteria:

- you are a good or outstanding LA maintained school;
- you operate in a Rural Village or Rural Hamlet setting, as defined by the Rural Urban classification on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk);
- according to progress metrics, your school has remained within the same band or improved;
- in phonics, where applicable, your school either meets or exceeds the national average;
- in EBacc, where applicable, your school either meets or exceeds 34.7% entry rate;
- in your application you identify two other local partner schools who will be expected to submit applications to join your new trust by 31st March 2021, and to join the trust by 31st March 2022, as a condition of funding.

Rural LA maintained schools with an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding but not meeting the progress, phonics and EBacc metrics above are eligible to be partner schools but cannot be the lead school in the application.

Schools with an Ofsted rating of RI or Inadequate are eligible to be part of group applying for funding where the school only makes up 25% or less of the schools in the application, i.e. on an application of 4 schools, the other 3 schools are rated Good or Outstanding.

3. Application process

3.1. The Application Form

The application form is split into four sections, as follows:

- **Section A – Details of existing trusts applying to strands A-C:** requests key details from existing trusts, such as the name of their organisation, group or school ID and Companies Registration Number.
- **Section B – Details of schools applying for strand D:** requests key details from schools, such as name of the school and details of the applicant.
- **Section C – Application details:** requests information about the strand of TCaF funding you wish to apply for and the associated growth project.
- **Section D – Project details:** requests information about the project for which you are applying for funding. This section of the application form is designed for applicants to provide a timeline of activities, details of the trusts members and summarise the most important features and rationale behind their projects.

An accounting officer in the applicant organisation will need to ratify all applications. This individual will be accountable for delivery, ensuring funding is used correctly and that the terms of the grant funding agreement are met.

The accounting officer is also accountable for ensuring compliance with the [Department for Education's terms and conditions of the grant funding agreement](#).

Further guidance on what information is required can be found in the [application form](#) itself.

3.2. Submitting your application

Please email your completed application form to the RSC office for the area in which you are proposing to work. Details of the different RSC offices, including which areas they cover, and the mailbox to send your completed applications to, can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

When submitting your application, please include your organisation's name and the words '**Trust Capacity Fund Application**' in the email subject field.

We recommend you submit both your growth proposal and TCaF application in good time to avoid any delay to your application being considered.

3.3. Receipt of applications

On receipt of applications, we will undertake checks to ensure applicants have completed all required details in the relevant fields of the application form, and that the application meets all requirements of the fund.

TCaF is a competitive grant, so please submit your strongest projects relative to the assessment criteria.

Your application is not an agreement of grant and meeting the selection criteria does not guarantee funding. Funding is limited and applications will be assessed and prioritised according to the extent to which they meet the selection criteria. Only strong, viable applications that clearly demonstrate how the trust will grow effectively and sustainably are likely to be successful for funding.

Please note, you will not be entitled to claim from the department any costs or expenses which you may incur in preparing your bid, regardless of whether your bid is successful or not.

3.4. Questions and clarifications

Prospective applicants may query and seek clarification on any aspect of this fund or guidance, prior to the submission of their applications. The department also reserves the right to contact you to clarify elements of your application: this is not an opportunity to provide additional detail beyond that already contained within the application.

Questions must be submitted to the [RSC office](#) for the area you are proposing to work in.

The department will not enter into exclusive discussions regarding the requirements of this grant with potential applicants.

4. Assessment

All projects received by the application deadline will be subject to a two-stage assessment process.

Please Note: Applicants must also submit a growth application, as detailed in [section 1.4](#), to their RSC for discussion at HTB. Applications rejected by the RSC at this stage will not be considered any further for TCaF funding.

4.1. Stage 1: Initial eligibility

During stage 1 applicants will use one of two [eligibility checkers](#) (either for strands A-C or for strand D), which are automated assessment tools based on the eligibility information detailed in [section 2.1](#), to check whether they are eligible for the fund. In certain cases, applicants may need to input additional data to determine eligibility. Once applicants have confirmed eligibility, and for which strand, they will submit an application form. Stage 1 will only serve as an initial sift and funding decisions will not be made until after stage 2.

4.2. Stage 2: Assessment Criteria

Applicants who are eligible for funding will enter stage 2 of the assessment process, at which point we will assess the details of the bids provided in the application form. Stage 2 will assess proposals against the following criteria:

- Geographical need
- Contextual need
- Deliverability
- Value for money
- Sustainability
- Resource Management

Assessors will evaluate each project using the information contained within the application and data generated from DfE centrally held sources to make a relative judgement.

Applications will also be subject to a financial health assessment using the core financial returns shared with the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

The following sections set out the basis for judgements under each set of assessment criteria and the information you might need to consider providing to support your application.

Geographical need

The level of need in the local area covered by the proposal will be assessed, by comparing the number of at-risk schools and projects in a Local Authority District (LAD), with the supply of strong trusts in the same area. RSCs will also refer to local intelligence to inform decision-making: for example, to ensure that boundary issues and anomalous cases do not unduly influence decisions. We will also consider whether the proposal targets an Opportunity Area, Achieving Excellence Area or area of high-disadvantage.

Contextual need

Applications will be assessed as to the relative level of priority attached to the project, based on contextual factors. Projects in the following contexts, that the department has identified as priorities for development, will be deemed higher priority under this criterion:

- Vulnerable schools, particularly those judged 'inadequate';
- Special Educational Needs provision;
- Alternative Provision;
- Rural Village and Rural Hamlet settings within the [Rural Urban Classification](#);
- Faith-based provision.

Additionally, applications will be deemed stronger under this criterion if, in the judgement of the RSC, there are factors that escalate significantly the level of risk to any trust taking on the particular project. These include, but are not limited to, the current and historical educational and financial performance of the school and the condition of school estates.

RSCs will consider all aspects of an application in their decision-making, and applications will be prioritised for funding according to the scoring. Proposals which support the above priorities will not automatically receive funding, but will receive a higher contextual score and be prioritised accordingly when reviewed against other applications as part of the competitive process. Proposals which aim to support schools outside of these priority contexts and areas are still eligible for funding and will be assessed accordingly.

Deliverability

Applications will be assessed on the degree to which they are able to provide strong evidence that the funded activity will be completed and paid for by 31st March 2021. Funding will be paid in arrears throughout the funding period on completion of agreed activity. Activities for which funding will be paid should start no earlier than 6th April 2020. Projects will be deemed stronger if they are able to:

- provide a realistic delivery plan for the size of the project, supported by appropriate evidence, including good consideration and mitigation of risk; and
- provide assurance that all funded activities will be completed by 31st March 2021.

Value for money

Applications will be assessed on the degree to which they provide value for money. Value for money is the demonstration of projects being appropriately costed; that all project costs are within an appropriate range for the type of work proposed; and that there is a clear need for additional funding in order for the proposed activity to be delivered, particularly where it is already underway prior to submission of the application. Applications will be assessed on whether the funding requested is proportionate to the scale of activity and the level of risk. Projects will be deemed stronger under this criterion if they are able to:

- provide clear and full details of all costs;
- provide clear evidence that costs are minimised, and the delivery model is clear and cost-effective in relation to the scale of activity and intended impact;
- provide assurance that the activity would not otherwise take place without TCAF funding, and could not be funded through other sources;
- provide evidence that overall costs are at or below expectations; and
- all cost elements should appear reasonable and where there are 'abnormal' or high costs they are clearly justified.

Sustainability

Applications will be assessed on the degree to which they are able to provide evidence that the project will be sustainable after completion. Projects will be deemed stronger under this criterion if they are able to:

- demonstrate how the project provides value for money, including what savings could be realised, and how these will support the further development of the trust
- provide clear evidence of projected costs and mitigation of risks;
- provide clear evidence that the trust can afford to pay for any new capabilities beyond March 2021, e.g. staffing costs, as well as how; and
- provide clear evidence that the trust will be financially sustainable without additional revenue support from the department.

Resource management

Applications will be assessed as to the extent to which trust resources are used to support high-quality teaching and the best educational outcomes for pupils. Projects will be deemed stronger under this criterion relative to thresholds on a range of statistics that have been identified by the department as indicators of good resource management and outcomes.

4.3. Penalties and deductions

During this second stage assessment RSC officials will also be checking applications to

ensure departmental guidance is being adhered to. Where this is not the case, applications will be subject to penalties and points deductions, and there may be extra conditions attached to any grant funding. Where deductions have been applied, these will be made clear in departmental feedback.

Excessive Executive Pay

During the second stage assessment, Excessive Executive Pay (EEP) will be assessed. Any applicant deemed to have EEP will be subject to a points deduction from their overall application. We will adopt a differentiated points deduction between London and the rest of the country, to recognise salary differences. Any applicant that remains successful after the points deduction will need to commit to taking steps to address EEP as a condition of TCaF funding. Details on the criteria for defining EEP is included at **Annex A**.

School Resource Management Advisor

If an applicant has received a visit from a School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) within the last 12 months their application will be assessed to determine whether they have actioned recommendations made by the SRMA. Where RSC officials are concerned that substantial progress has not been made in taking action on recommendations, and where there is no clear rationale for this, the application will be subject to further review and may suffer a points deduction. Any applicant that remains successful after this points deduction will be required to action the SRMAs recommendations within the 2020-21 financial year as a condition of funding.

Failure to update trust details

During the application process applicants will be required to provide details of the trust's members and trustees, including their email address and the date they were appointed. For applicants who are forming a new trust they will be required to provide the details of the proposed trust's members and trustees. This information must also be updated on the [Get Information About Schools](#) website, if required. Failure to do so will result in a points deduction.

Internal Audit Reports

In the second stage assessment, RSC officials will also be required to check whether trusts have submitted their internal audit reports alongside their annual accounts return. If trusts have failed to do so, there will be a points deduction from their application.

Grant Funding Agreement Compliance

In the second stage assessment, RSC officials will check whether applicants previously applied to TCaF 19-20 and, if so, whether they effectively complied with the financial reporting requirements outlined in the grant funding agreement. If successful applicants

submitted Annex J returns late, the RSC and moderation panel may apply a points deduction.

4.4. Moderation

All second-stage assessments will be subject to national moderation on a regular basis, to ensure consistency in scoring and decision making across regions, as well as to maximise value for money. Where bids exceed the level of funding available, we reserve the right to prioritise applications according to our scoring criteria.

Following moderation we intend to communicate decisions to trusts in a timely manner.

5. Next steps

5.1. What happens if your application is successful?

We will inform you via email if your application is successful or not after the assessment process is complete.

We will provide successful organisations with the final version of the department's grant funding agreement. This agreement will set out our expectations of all successful applicants and all bidders will be required to accept the final version in full.

5.2. Terms and conditions of grant funding

Before submitting an application, applicants should ensure they have read and understood the [Department for Education grant funding agreement terms and conditions](#). In applying for TCaF, applicants will be agreeing to the Department for Education grant funding agreement terms and conditions.

In the event of an application being successful, the applicant will be required to sign a grant funding agreement. This will set out the specific grant conditions, monitoring arrangements and payment details. Grant funding will be paid to trusts in arrears throughout the funding period once agreed activity has been completed and evidenced.

Annex A: Excessive Executive Pay

RSC officials will actively check whether the department has previously written to the trust about Excessive Executive Pay (EEP) and will deduct points from the overall application score for trusts with EEP, in a similar manner to the safeguarding measures of the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF). The criteria for defining trusts with EEP is:

- the latest financial statements show the trust is paying either two or more executive salaries of £100k+ or one or more salary of £150k+; and one or more of the following:
 - there is evidence of financial and/or educational underperformance within the trust; and/or
 - the trust made a commitment to reduce excessive salaries within a given timescale, but this has not been evidenced in their financial submission; and/or
 - there has actually been an evidenced increase in spend on £100+k salaries year-on-year within the trust (according to published financial statements; and no significant change within the trust).

We will adopt a differentiated approach between London and the rest of the country, to recognise salary differences. Any trusts with EEP who remain successful after the points deduction will need to commit to taking steps to address EEP as a condition of funding.

Annex B: Application checklist

Before you start your application

Check that you have:

- Referred to the *Information for applicants* guidance and used this to check that your application is in line with TCaF priorities and assessment criteria
- Used the eligibility checkers on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) to check which strand of the fund you are eligible to apply for

Preparation of evidence

Check that you have:

- Summarised your project description, cost and delivery plan in your application
- Submitted a growth application to your RSC, or are preparing to do so
- Completed all relevant parts of the application form

Making an application

Check that you have:

- Planned your application ahead of the deadline so that you can review it and seek advice from the relevant RSC office in order to resolve any issues before the application deadline
- Not included embedded files with your application
- Not included websites or other external links in your application as these will not be accessed



Department
for Education

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About this publication:

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Reference: DFE-00234-2019



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