



Department
for Education

Planned expenditure on schools, education and children's services by local authorities in England, 2015-16: Quality and methodology information

About this release

This document provides an overview of the data used in the production of the planned expenditure on schools, children and young people's services by local authorities statistical release.

It provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data including how it is validated.

It is based on the Office for National Statistics' [guidelines for measuring statistical quality](#).

Feedback

We are changing the way our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at marcia.merchant@education.gsi.gov.uk

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1. About the output

Data Collection

LAs are required to provide the DfE with a Section 251 Budget Return shortly after the start of each financial year. This is to ensure LAs provide financial data in a consistent manner that can support comparisons and benchmarking with other LAs. The most recent administrative directives (that determine the form, content and responsibilities towards their publication) can be found [here](#).

The data in the tables of this release, which focuses on expenditure of schools, does not encompass all schools in England. The Section 251 Budget Return data only includes the planned expenditure on local authority maintained schools (essentially the funding of maintained schools by the LA based on its own local funding formula) as well as Individual Schools Budget figures for recoupment academies. However it does include full-year budgets for schools which were LA maintained as at 31st March 2015, irrespective of whether some of these schools were known to be converting to academy status during the course of the year. Academy school finance data is published separately by the EFA.

The Section 251 Budget Return includes information on the funding of LA maintained schools and from 2013-14 the Individual Schools Budget figures within the Total Schools Budget also include figures for recoupment academies. This means that care must be taken to understand the context within which this data sits. The complex picture on school funding means that for elements of the Section 251 Budget Return it is not possible to produce year on year comparisons. Wherever possible, statistics are provided showing planned spending 'per capita' (by combining the financial return with pupil numbers and/or population estimates) to make comparisons over time more robust.

Information on DfE's budget and planned expenditure is available from pages 15 and 16 of the Department's Business Plan, available [here](#).

The planned expenditure of LAs has been collected since the 2000-2001 financial year. Statistics from these annual collections have been published, each year, at national and LA level via the DfE website available [here](#).

Punctuality

The proposed month of publication is announced on gov.uk at least twelve months in advance and precise dates are announced in the same place at least four weeks prior to publication. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, the change and the reasons for it would be announced.

Context

In 2015-16 DfE plans to spend £59.4bn in total (excluding Annually Managed Expenditure). Of this, £4.7bn is targeted for capital expenditure (spending on assets with a lasting value, such as buildings and equipment) primarily on schools via LAs. A further £0.3bn is earmarked as administration spending for the running of the central Department for Education. The remaining £54.4bn is planned for spending on a combination of schools (£47.0bn), support for 16-19 year olds (£7.1bn) and Children and Families (£0.3bn).

The majority of the £47.0bn finds its ways to the schools budget through the following routes:

- a. The Dedicated Schools Grant – funding to LAs to support maintained schools in their area.
- b. The Education Services Grant – funding for all pupils in all schools, to cover the cost of central services provided by local authorities to maintained schools, or procured separately by academies.
- c. Grants paid direct to academy schools. For example, the School Budget Share, grants for insurance and Start Up grants for new academy schools.
- d. Pupil Premium – funding to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

LAs combine the money they receive from DfE, along with other funding streams, to generate their total budgets for the financial year. They then report their budgets for education, children and young people's services to the DfE as required under Section 251 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PLANNED EXPENDITURE: THE CONTEXT OF FUNDING REFORM

Traditionally LAs in England received money from the DfE for pre-16 education in the form of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The LA combined these income streams with money from other sources to allocate budgets to all schools in their area based on locally held funding formulae. As a result, the Section 251 Budget Return covered planned spending on all schools, children's and young people's services by LAs.

Academy schools receive their funding directly from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) within DfE (rather than through the LA). The Individual Schools Budget figures from 2013-14 Budget Returns include figures for recouplement academies which mean caution is advised when making comparisons with earlier years.

In order to report on LA budgets in a meaningful way, the data presented within this statistical release includes a number of 'per capita' measures - in essence, the amount of budget allocated divided by the number of people it is earmarked for. This 'per capita' figure is derived using the Section 251 Budget Return data with a number of population sources, depending on the sub-category of the planned expenditure being looked at. For funding lines which are only targeted at pupils, the funding has been divided by the number of pupils in the relevant school types taken from the Department's School Census information. The School Census pupil numbers for each year are taken from the January prior to the start of the relevant financial year for consistency with the LA Benchmarking Tables.

For funding lines which cover all children within the LA (regardless of school attended) we use ONS population estimates for children of school age. The ONS population estimates are taken from the latest available 2012 based population estimates available from the ONS website [here](#).

LOCAL AUTHORITY BENCHMARKING TABLES OF PLANNED EXPENDITURE

The LA Benchmarking Tables of Planned Expenditure are drawn from the same Section 251 Budget Returns as the statistics contained in this release. The benchmarking tables give the information in Table 1 on planned expenditure in 2015-16 in detail for all individual LAs. The tables also provide information on the percentage change in LAs' planned expenditure on education from 2014-15 to 2015-16 for selected expenditure categories. The tables are primarily used by School Forums and LAs to compare expenditure levels between LAs.

The LA Benchmarking Tables of Planned Expenditure and their background information, including methodology, can be found in the Benchmarking section of the S251 website [here](#).

Relevance

The Section 251 Budget data supplied by LAs is used in a number of ways:

- As the authoritative source for comparisons of LAs and how they plan their expenditure and fund their schools.
- Enhancing the evidence base used to support the decision making within the Department.

As the authoritative source for responding to Parliamentary Questions, Freedom of Information requests and requests for information other organisations and from the general public.

2. Accuracy and reliability

Data coverage, quality and validation

All 152 LAs provided a complete Section 251 Budget Return for the 2015-16 financial year.

The Section 251 Budget data passes through several phases of checking and data cleaning. Extensive guidance and support is provided to LAs to help them ensure the data they provide is as accurate as possible. With 152 LAs providing detailed data of their planned expenditure across a wide range of funding/expenditure categories the potential for variation in local accounting practices is high. The Section 251 Budget guidance aims to reduce the impact of these local variations by collecting data in as consistent a format possible, and having extensive phases of checking and sign off. Each LA was subject to the aforementioned data collection and cleaning phases and all LAs signed off their data to confirm their data is fit for purpose.

There are no planned revisions to this Statistical Release however, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the departmental revisions policy which is published [here](#).

Disclosure Control

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires us to take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality.

We round numbers and because of this rounding totals in text and in tables may not always equal the sum of their component parts. Similarly, differences quoted in text may not always be the same as differences shown in tables. This is consistent with the [Departmental statistical policy](#). We also adopt the following symbols:

- . not applicable
- .. not available

3. Accessibility

The SR text is published in pdf format so that it is accessible to all users irrespective of their choice of software. Care is also taken to ensure that the document meets accessibility guidelines. Key figures are highlighted in the SR text which draws out the key messages such as changes over. Small tables or charts illustrating key figures are also included in the text.

Each SR is accompanied by formatted excel tables with clear titles which allow general users to find more detail than can be provided in the SR text. Any important limitations or inconsistencies in the data are mentioned in footnotes so that users don't have to refer to the text or this document.

4. Further information is available

Previously published figures Figures for 2014-15 are available [here](#)

Related publications

We are aware that users look at finance related information from a variety of angles. The presentation of LA planned expenditure data on a per capita basis will continue to be presented in this fashion as part of our commitments to transparency and to support the uses outlined above. There are however other releases on the funding of schools of which readers will wish to be aware:

Local authority maintained schools

- **Section 251 Outturn statistics.** Whereas this release focuses on planned expenditure, the outturn statistics focus on actual expenditure by LAs (and their schools). The next release of these data is due in December 2015 and the actual expenditure statistics will relate to the 2014-15 financial year. Statistics relating to the actual expenditure by local authorities in 2015-16 will be collected in the summer of 2016 (after the end of the financial year) and published in December 2016. The latest available data can be found [here](#).
- **Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR).** This is a school level data collection and provides detailed information on a school's income, expenditure and revenue balance for the financial year. The next release (of the 2014-15 data) is scheduled for December 2015 and is published alongside Outturn data. The latest available data can be found [here](#).

Academy school data

- Academy school budgets are administered by the EFA within DfE. As the number of academy schools grows, the interest in their budget data is also increasing. In line with that interest, EFA are committed to making the academy schools' budget data available, accessible [here](#).
- Academy schools are funded on an academic year basis which is different to local authority (LA) maintained schools (which are funded on a financial year basis). They also receive the education services grant paid to academy schools in recognition of the fact that as independent schools they no longer receive a number of services from LAs and must make appropriate provision for themselves. For academic year 2015 to 2016 this is calculated at a national rate of £87 per pupil, with a protection against losses resulting from the reduction in the rate from £140 the previous year. Timescales and the scope of funding purposes mean academy schools funding is not directly comparable with that of LA maintained schools. For a more detailed explanation of these issues please see the Technical Notes.
- **Accounts Return (AR)** To support the fulfilment of duties required under the Companies Act, academy schools make a return to the EFA which covers their income and expenditure and financial position.

Caution is advised when making any comparisons between CFR returns from LA maintained schools and AR from academy schools. The data is not directly comparable for a number of reasons, including:

- The CFR relates to funding allocated and spent within a standard financial year – April to March. Academies, and the AR, report on a financial and academic year of September to August.
 - Academies have responsibilities that maintained schools do not, particularly around service previously provided by the local
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authority (library services, behavioural support services, audit costs etc.) and maintenance of capital assets. This can affect what the academy spends its funding on, meaning that an academy, by its nature, is likely to have a different pattern of spend than a maintained school.

Schools Block funding allocations 2015-16

The EFA is publishing a report which will present data giving the schools block allocations to each individual mainstream maintained school for financial year 2015 to 2016, and academy for academic year 2015 to 2016.

5. Got a query? Like to give feedback?

If from the media	Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT 020 7783 8300
If non-media	Marcia Merchant, Infrastructure and Funding Directorate, Department for Education, Bishopsgate House, Feethams, Darlington DL1 5QE 01325 340670 marcia.merchant@education.gsi.gov.uk

6. Glossary and abbreviations

Definitions	The definitions of all the Section 251 Budget categories are available on the Department's website at the following link. Specifically there is a 2015-16 Budget Tables and Guidance document which provides an example of the return to be made and description of the data required in each budget line .
Coverage	<p>The LA planned expenditure on education/school funding data contained within the Section 251 Budget is for LA maintained schools. However, from 2013-14 the Individual Schools Budget category includes figures for recoupmnt academies. There are fundamental differences between the scope of what funding for LA maintained schools covers compared with what academy schools' budgets cover, which make comparison of the data on a like for like basis analytically difficult. Some, but not all, of these issues can be controlled for by working with granular level data and removing certain elements of funding. Examples of the need for caution include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academy schools receive an Education Services Grant (ESG) in recognition of the fact that as independent schools they no longer receive a number of services from LAs and must make appropriate provision for themselves.• LA maintained school funding covers financial years,

whereas academy school funding covers academic years.

- Academies may receive start up grants during their year of opening.
- Post 16 funding needs to be removed from LA maintained schools (or added into academy data) to compare like with like in terms of the pupils covered.
- Early years funding will generally not be included within academy budgets (except for a very small number of cases).
- Academy rates and additional Insurance costs are paid for on receipt by EFA and so the position at the time of reporting the data is not always fully developed.

Per Capita

As more academy schools open it is becoming increasingly important to distinguish pupil numbers between the different items of expenditure on a per capita basis. The 'per capita' figures are derived using the Section 251 Budget Return data with a number of population sources, depending on the sub-category of the planned expenditure being looked at. The population categories are:

- Total pupils aged 3-19 from maintained schools only;
- Total pupils aged 3-19 from maintained schools and recoupment academies only;
- Total pupils aged 3-19 from maintained schools and all academies;
- Total population aged between 0-17; and
- Total population aged between 0-19.

School Phase

Table 2 of the statistical release shows the detailed LA planned expenditure for the 2015-16 financial year by school phase. This is a national aggregate of the data provided by all 152 LAs. The information published is similar to that published in previous years.

Gross figures

Are actual total estimated costs of the activities before allowance for any expected income, but after allowing for any "buyback" income from the local authority's own schools to avoid double-counting. Both expenditure and income should be excluded where LA maintained schools are buying services.

Income figures

Are any estimated income the local authority expects to be able to offset against gross expenditure on an activity. This will only include central government grants if they are additional to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which is considered as income. Income sources could also include private sources, other LAs' fees, charges paid by parents (e.g. meals, music, board/lodging) and lettings.

Net figures

Are calculated automatically by subtracting any income from the gross figures.



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This document is also available from our website available [here](#).