

# Schools Commercial: Performance of Initiatives

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## Introduction

In 2020 the Schools Commercial Team published an updated <u>Schools' Buying Strategy</u>, intended to support schools in their buying decisions and allow them to maximise the resources that could be invested in education for their pupils. The strategy indicated schools often face a complex marketplace when procuring goods and services, and that market provision is not always accommodating to school buyers' needs. As a result, buyers can face high costs and time-consuming processes.

The strategy included a range of initiatives to address these issues; to support buyers to be smart consumers and to have the right skills and relationships, and to ensure buyers have access to best value. The strategy identified various strands to support schools in this space:

- 1. The promotion of approved frameworks
- 2. The provision of a Get Help Buying for Schools (GHBS) service
- 3. The provision of the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA)
- 4. Access to buyers networks

In 2017 the Schools Commercial Team published an <u>earlier</u> Schools' Buying Strategy, which identified two strands to support schools in a similar space that have since expired:

- 1. The promotion of an Energy Efficiency Loans Scheme
- 2. The pilot of School Buying Hubs

All initiatives listed are designed to simplify the buying process for schools and to offer a viable route for accessing value for money when purchasing goods and services.

These initiatives are part of a wider <u>School Resource Management (SRM) portfolio</u>. The SRM Portfolio draws together activity across the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Education (DfE) aimed at securing efficiency and long-term value from schools' spending, making every pound count. It includes a suite of tools, practical support and guidance for schools and academies to help reduce costs on regular purchases and recruitment, improve their access to final information and give School Business Professionals (SBPs) access to the support that they need to manage their costs effectively for the benefit of pupils.

## **Summary of Initiatives**

#### **Promoted Frameworks**

DfE currently approves and recommends a selection of frameworks, via the Find a Framework portal. Schools can use the portal to access frameworks covering a range of spend areas, for example: Utilities, ICT, and Facilities Management. As outlined in the 2017 strategy, schools could access discounts of around 10% on energy or multifunctional devices (printers, scanners and photocopiers) spend by using the promoted frameworks. Schools can also save time through using the promoted frameworks, which are more tailored to schools' needs than market alternatives and are designed to simplify the procurement process.

Throughout FY 2022-23, the DfE worked closely with Public Service Buying Organisations to identity and recommend frameworks in response to changes in the economic landscape, particularly rising energy prices and cost-of-living challenges such as catering provision. The number of endorsed frameworks is now over 65.

## Salix Energy Efficiency Loan Schemes

DfE also promoted an energy efficiency loan scheme, delivered and marketed by <u>Salix Finance</u>. Schools used the scheme to access interest-free loans to help pay the upfront costs of energy efficiency improvements, such as low-energy lighting, insulation and boilers. The scheme supported schools by saving money on energy bills, via reducing energy consumption and total carbon emissions.

For example, one primary school utilised the scheme to fund multiple energy efficiency measures, including a ground source heat pump. The project is estimated to reduce the school's carbon emissions by 77%, and save the school over £5,000 per year.

The scheme expired on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, but DfE still tracks residual savings from loans which were committed during the life of the scheme.

## **Schools Buying Hubs**

Launched in 2017, two Buying Hubs operated for schools in North West and South West of England, with the North West Hub closing in December 2021 and the South West in March 2022, with the final savings being realised in April 2022. Schools in each region could use their Hub to access specialist advice and support with upcoming contracts, leases, and purchases on non-teaching staff goods and services. Specialist support benefitted schools by saving both time and money on procurements and allowed schools to make savings by effectively buying on a regional basis.

For example, a Multi-academy trust saved an estimated £1.5m by changing to a new catering contract following support from their Hub. Also, a Special Educational Needs college saved 60% over the lifetime of a new multi-functional devices contract by using a promoted framework recommended by their Hub. Over 2,600 schools engaged with their regional Hubs.

Lessons learned from the Hubs were carried into a new Get Help Buying for Schools service, which reports its first savings to schools in this update.

## **Get Help Buying for Schools (GHBS)**

Get Help Buying for Schools is a service made up of various resources to help schools buy goods and services efficiently and compliantly. Schools can use the service to <u>request</u> <u>advice and support</u> from procurement specialists when buying non-teaching staff related goods and services. Schools can also use a '<u>Create a Specification</u>' tool to help write a catering or multifunctional devices specification, and <u>guidance</u> is provided to learn about the steps of procurement and how to buy compliantly.

The service is provided free at the point of use and can help schools save money and time when buying goods and services.

## The Risk Protection Arrangement for Schools (RPA)

The RPA is an alternative to commercial insurance for academy trusts and schools. Under the RPA, the UK government covers the losses instead of commercial insurance. It was launched in September 2014 and covers four main classes of claims: Property Damage and Business Interruption, Employers Liability, Public Liability, and Travel. RPA is available to both academy trusts and schools, and members opt-in to the scheme through the DfE portal. A per pupil deduction is taken from members' General Annual Grant or Dedicated Schools Grant, with this deduction set on an annual basis and thesame for all members (£21 per pupil). This rate applies from April 22 to March 23 for maintained schools and from September 22 to August 23 for academies.

## **Buyers Networks**

A National Network Leaders Forum was launched in June 2017 to provide peer-to-peer support for School Business Professionals (SBPs) and allows SBPs to share knowledge about <u>buyers networks</u> at a local level. The primary aim of the networks is to provide a platform for SBPs to share advice and knowledge about the sector, to compare prices, and share tips and best practice. The networks also act as a first line of trusted support that SBPs can access when they need advice.

## **Performance Data**

#### **Performance Data for Promoted Frameworks**

#### **Spend Performance**

The table below indicates the total value of nominal spend which has been reported to the Department by schools on promoted frameworks from Financial Year 2017-18. Further details on methodology can be found in the Performance Methodology section.

**Table 1:** Recorded spend data for Promoted Frameworks from Financial Year (FY) 2017-18 to 2022-23. Spend data is supplied directly from framework providers.

Recorded spend by schools through DfE Promoted Frameworks	Spend
FY 2022-23	£284.7m
FY 2021-22	£242.3m
FY 2020-21	£134.2m
FY 2019-20	£129.5m
FY 2018-19	£97.0m
FY 2017-18	£54.1m

As outlined in the <u>2017 strategy</u>, schools can access savings by using DfE Promoted Frameworks compared to the average market rate for similar goods and services. For example, one trust was able to save over £450k over the lifetime of a multi-functional devices contract through using the promoted framework.

Frameworks are promoted across a range of different categories, with another trust saving 15% on temporary staff expenditure, and another school able to save £100,000 per annum through an ICT framework. Savings made by schools can be re-invested in student learning, with one primary school using the savings made from a promoted framework to fund new art materials and more after-school clubs. It is important to note however average alternative market rates for goods and services continuously evolve over time, savings estimates will vary depending on the point in time chosen and will differ by school.

As of July 2023, DfE currently recommends over 65 frameworks, an increase from 50 in April 2022. As frameworks can be added to the list of recommendations, or expire and not be replaced, these figures are a snapshot of a specific point in time and not reflective of the number of recommended frameworks across the whole financial year.

## **Performance Data for Salix Energy Efficiency Loan Schemes**

The tables below indicate the total value of estimated savings made by schools through the scheme from 2017-18, and total number of new projects committed in each year. Further details on methodology can be found in the Performance Methodology section.

**Table 2a:** Savings through projects committed through the Salix Finance Loan Schemes from FY 2017-18, including lifetime savings made in the year through projects committed in previous years.

Savings through Salix Finance Loan Schemes	Estimated Savings
across FY 2022-23	£25.6m – from existing and previous projects, as the scheme had closed to new applicants
across FY 2021-22	£26.5m – from existing and previous projects, as the scheme had closed to new applicants
across FY 2020-21	£23.4m
across FY 2019-20	£20.9m
across FY 2018-19	£17.4m
across FY 2017-18	£13.7m

**Table 2b:** Number of new projects committed for schools through the Salix schemes from FY 2017-18 to 2020-21.

No new projects were committed in FY 2021-22 or FY 2022-23.

Number of new projects committed for schools	Number of New Projects
across FY 2020-21	667
across FY 2019-20	488
across FY 2018-19	564
across FY 2017-18	519

## **Performance Data for School Buying Hubs**

The tables below indicate the costs for Schools Buying Hubs, the total value of estimated contract term savings the Hubs helped schools to achieve, and the number of schools who engaged with the Hubs. Further details on the methodology can be found in the Performance Methodology section.

A structure to track and report savings was agreed between the Hubs providers and the Department in mid-2018, during an advice and guidance phase which lasted from November 2017 to November 2019. From then, savings were reported monthly to the Department.

The NW Hub closed in January 2022 and the SW Hub closed in March 2022. Some final figures were internally reported in April 2022; these have been added to the FY 2021-22 figure below from the previous publication.

**Table 3a:** Costs for Schools Buying Hubs.

Costs for Schools Buying Hubs	Costs	Benefit:Cost Ratio from Nov- 19 to period end
FY 2021-22	£3.3m	4.02
FY 2020-21	£3.5m	3.32
Nov 2019 to Mar 2020, to exclude advice and guidance phase	£1.3m	3.53
Nov 2017 to Nov 2019, during advice and guidance phase	£3.7m	-

**Table 3b:** Increases in estimated realised contract term savings that the Hubs helped schools to achieve. Savings are the difference between the price paid and a benchmark price of the new contract/lease/purchase.

Increase in realised contract term savings delivered by the School Buying Hubs	Estimated Savings
FY 2021-22	£16.5m (includes £2.4m reported in April 2022)
FY 2020-21	£11.5m
FY 2019-20	£9.2m
From Nov 2017 and throughout FY 2018-19	£2.4m

**Table 3c:** Total cumulative number of schools engaged with the Hubs. To qualify, schools must have actively opened a case with the Hubs.

Cumulative number of schools who have engaged with the Hubs	Number of Schools
To end FY 2021-22	2,655
To end FY 2020-21	2,294
To end FY 2019-20	1,649

## **Performance Data for Get Help Buying for Schools**

The tables below indicate the costs for Get Help Buying for Schools, the total value of estimated contract term savings GHBS has helped schools to achieve, and the number of schools who engaged with GHBS. Further details on the methodology can be found in the Performance Methodology section.

A savings reporting structure has been agreed internally which monitors performance over time. This structure is reviewed periodically, at least every two years, to help best quantify savings.

Table 4a: Costs for Get Help Buying for Schools

Costs for Get Help Buying for Schools	Costs
FY 2022-23	£3.5m

**Table 4b:** Increases in estimated realised contract term savings that Get Help Buying for Schools has helped schools to achieve. Savings are the difference between the price paid and a benchmark price of the new contract/lease/purchase.

Increase in estimated realised contract term savings delivered by Get Help Buying for Schools	Estimated Savings
FY 2022-23	£6.7m

**Table 4c:** Total cumulative number of schools and trusts engaged with Get Help Buying for Schools. To qualify, schools and trusts must have actively opened a case, or started a specification through the 'Create a Specification' tool.

Number of schools and trusts who have engaged with Get Help Buying for Schools	Number of Schools and Trusts
FY 2022-23	909*

<sup>\*</sup> Multi-Academy Trusts are able to use the service on behalf of numerous schools, though the service does not currently track which schools they are buying for and so each MAT engagement is only counted as one engagement. Therefore, the true number schools that have benefitted from the service is likely to be higher than 909.

## **Performance Data for RPA**

The tables below indicate the total value of estimated savings made by schools through the RPA scheme from FY 2017-18 to FY 2022-23. Further details on methodology can be found in the Performance Methodology section.

**Table 5a:** Estimated savings in insurance spend and number of RPA memberships from FY 2017-18 to 2022-23 - evidenced through Academies Accounts Return (AAR) spend data against the baseline spend in insurance prior to RPA's introduction.

RPA Savings to Members	Estimated Savings	Number of RPA Memberships (average over FY)
FY 2022-23	£118.1m	7,814 academies
FY 2021-22	£114.3m	7,310 academies
FY 2020-21	£101.6m	6,840 academies
FY 2019-20	£88.7m	5,981 academies
FY 2018-19	£76.4m	5,218 academies
FY 2017-18	£64.9m	4,343 academies

**Table 5b:** Estimated savings in insurance spend by non-members\* of RPA from FY 2017-18 to FY 2022-23, evidenced through AAR spend data against the baseline spend in insurance prior to RPA's introduction

RPA Savings to Non-Members	Estimated Savings
FY 2022-23	£32.0m
FY 2021-22	£38.1m
FY 2020-21	£45.3m
FY 2019-20	£47.1m
FY 2018-19	£43.3m
FY 2017-18	£41.5m

<sup>\*</sup> Non-members are not part of the RPA but are still able to benefit from reduced insurance costs as since the RPA was introduced, premiums to schools have reduced across the commercial insurance market.

**Table 5c:** Estimated savings in insurance spend by Local Authority Maintained Schools (LAMS), and number of members of RPA from FY 2017-18 to FY 2022-23, evidenced through AAR spend data (as a proxy) against the baseline spend in insurance prior to RPA's introduction

RPA Savings for Local Authority Maintained Schools (LAMS)	Estimated Savings	Number of RPA Memberships (average over FY)
FY 2022-23	£17.3m	1,940
FY 2021-22	£13.2m	1,391
FY 2020-21	£4.3m	439

## **Performance Data for Buyers Networks**

The table below indicates the proportion of Local Authorities with a School Business Professionals (SBP) Network in place as at March 2023.

**Table 6:** Coverage of Local Authority areas with a local SBP Network

Description	Proportion
Number of Local Authority areas with an SBP Network in place, as at March 2023	119 LAs covered by a SBP network 33 LAs with no known SBP network 78% of LAs covered by a SBP network

For a Local Authority to be covered, there must be at least one network within the Local Authority available for School Business Professionals to access. Where a network agrees to be published on the <u>directory</u>, any SBP within the Local Authority can approach the network to join. SBPs can then use the networks to share knowledge and best practice around the sector.

# **Performance Methodology and Data Quality**

#### **Promoted Frameworks**

#### Methodology

The framework providers agree to supply the Department with information on the total value of spend through the promoted frameworks made by educational establishments. This spend is then captured and monitored internally. The majority of frameworks are based on contractual agreements where the school makes payments each month or each quarter for the good or service. Schools may also be able to make one-off purchases on certain frameworks at any given time. Date of transaction must be supplied, along with total value of spend, so the Department can accurately monitor spend on frameworks over any given time frame.

For certain frameworks, only quarterly spend is available (i.e., how much the school spent on the framework over three months rather than in-month). Where this is the case, spend is proportioned evenly across the three months to achieve consistent month-by-month spend reporting across all frameworks. Likewise, for one framework where only annual spend is available, this is evenly distributed across the twelve months in the financial year.

Only certain educational establishments are in-scope. This includes academy schools and maintained schools, single-academy trusts, and multi-academy trusts, and excludesany Higher or Further Education establishments. Any spend on frameworks by schoolsoutside of these boundaries will not be captured and included.

Through the lifetime of the 'Find a Framework' portal over 100 frameworks have been recommended and promoted. About 40 frameworks have expired since being promoted. If a framework expires new schools will not be able to access the framework, though schools which had signed up to the framework prior to its expiry may continue to use the agreement. Therefore, all related spend (on expired frameworks) will be captured should schools continue to use the framework post-expiry and realise the benefits.

As disclosing information on individual frameworks may prejudice a suppliers' commercial interests, spend information on individual frameworks is not published.

#### **Data Quality**

A number of checks are carried out on data submitted by framework providers as part of the data reconciliation process, ensuring that they submit the required data fields, and identifying outliers in their figures which are double-checked with providers. Transactional spend data is tracked and, where an alteration to spend in previous months has occurred, (e.g., item was not procured or changes in procurement date) spend reports will be backdated to reflect these changes.

This process ensures DfE report on the most up to date and relevant information and reconciles with supplier submissions. These changes impact our understanding of school spending patterns which in turn help shape our understanding of school spending behaviours in terms of seasonality trends and demand.

It should be noted that all spend figures relating to frameworks in this document are in nominal terms.

## Salix Energy Efficiency Loan Schemes (expired)

#### Methodology

The scheme, which has now ended, worked by funding schools to help save money via energy efficiency improvement projects. The funding was provided via an interest-free loan, paid back through predicted savings on energy usage.

To calculate savings, schools who applied for the loan had to complete a compliance tool as part of their application. Applicants also had to input information on pre-project and post-project annual kWh consumption, energy type and project type, as well as current and forecasted energy price. Schools had to provide evidence about how this information has been calculated, for example through detailed lighting survey calculations with quotes and product specifications stated. Based on this information, the provider calculated the energy savings for individual projects, including savings made on energy bills infuture years as a result of the project running until expiry. It should be noted the calculations have not been adjusted for recent volatility in energy markets. For the figures quoted in the Performance section, annual savings include all savings made through new projects committed in the year, plus savings made in the year through projects committed in previous years. Schools can continue to accrue benefits from loans committed prior to the scheme's expiry.

#### **Data Quality**

The DfE worked with Salix Finance to help calculate individual projects' annual savings projections based on supplier estimations. These estimates are taken into account along with the lifetime of the projects to estimate the impact of energy savings over time. As projects were quoted to schools, some opportunities may have been later retracted by schools. As schools engaged with the provider to find solutions and maximise benefits, the scale and scope of demand from the school could also have changed, impacting performance. Therefore, to manage data quality effectively, the DfE may backdate savings estimates based on latest changes in estimations.

## **School Buying Hubs (expired)**

#### Methodology

A school could access the Buying Hubs to request specialist support with non-teaching staff related contracts, leases, and purchases. The Hubs would then either offer advice or provide hands-on support to schools with the request if required. If a school was at or past the award stage of a new contract/lease/purchase as a direct result of the advice or support by the Hubs, then realised savings could have been claimed. These are savings that the school would make over the lifetime of this new contract/lease/purchase, relative to counterfactual scenarios.

As each case was different, there was no uniform approach to calculate savings. Under the preferred method, the awarded price of the new contract/lease/purchase (following advice or support from the Hubs) was compared to the benchmark price of previous spend on the contract/lease/purchase, for example if a school changed its catering supplier.

If there was a significant change to the service requirements of a contract such that the previous price was no longer relevant, then a comparison of the winning bid to the average of all bids evaluated in the procurement could have been used. Comparison of awarded

price to the incumbent supplier renewal price could also have been used – for example when the Hub supported a school with Utilities contracts.

However, if the contract/lease/purchase did not replace an existing agreement, awarded price would have been compared to the benchmark of recommended retail price or average retail price, i.e. if a school purchases laptops for the first time. In some circumstances, if previous spend was unknown, the school or Hubs may have provided an estimate of previous spend as the benchmark, which was compared to the awarded price to calculate a saving. If average retail price or recommended retail price was unknown and there was only one quote from the tender, an agreed DfE savings rate would have been applied to the awarded price to calculate a benchmark spend. The difference between the awarded price and this calculated benchmark spend then acted as the saving amount. The savings rate differed by buying category.

#### **Data Quality**

Each month over the contract period, the two Hubs supplied data on all activities through the Hubs. This data held information on all opened requests: cases made by schools, including benchmark price, rationale for benchmark price, and saving estimates for all 'realised' cases. This data was then processed internally, and any realised cases with no new contract start date assigned to the case were rejected and did not contribute to savings figures. As each case had different circumstances, the Hub outlined the methodology for calculating savings and any estimates could have been backdated if the methodology was not deemed satisfactory by the DfE.

In few circumstances, an agreed DfE savings rate was applied to spend to calculate savings. These savings rates were refreshed accordingly based on market research and cases where previous spend was available, and where savings were calculated comparing new and previous spend.

Due to earlier alterations in the data collection process regarding time of procurement support activity, increases in savings delivered prior to March 2019 cannot be broken down into FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19. As with other initiatives, the DfE would backdate savings estimates were any alterations required.

## **Get Help Buying for Schools**

#### Methodology

Schools can access Get Help Buying for Schools to request advice and support from procurement specialists when buying non-teaching staff related goods and services. The level of support provided to schools and trusts will depend on the incoming request and is broken into 5 levels:

- Level 1: Get general guidance on buying goods and services.
- Level 2: Get specific advice on buying goods and services.
- Level 3: Get support with buying goods and services.
- Level 4: DfE support by buying goods and services through a framework.
- Level 5: DfE support by buying goods and services through quotes or bids.

As each case is different still, there is no uniform approach to calculating estimated 16

savings. For support levels 3 to 5, as with the School Buying Hubs the awarded price from the case will be compared to a benchmark price to calculate estimated savings. Typically, the awarded price will be compared to a benchmark price of previous spend on the good or service, for example if a school changes its cleaning provider.

However, this approach is not always appropriate, particularly when a school is buying something new or buying something that cannot be compared like-for-like with previous spend. In these instances, the awarded price is compared to the benchmark of alternative bids received or recommended retail price, to calculate estimated savings.

In some cases, whereby an approved framework is used, an agreed DfE savings rate may be applied to the awarded price to calculate a benchmark spend. The difference between the awarded price and this calculated benchmark spend will then act as the estimated saving amount. The estimated savings rate will differ by buying category. In each case, the saving will only be claimed if the case is past the 'award' (or equivalent) stage.

For support levels 1 and 2 the methodology to estimate and quantify savings is different and is evolving over time, as these cases are more 'hands-off' than other levels. The procurement specialist will record an estimated case value for each case, often supplied by the school. An agreed DfE savings rate is then applied to the estimated case value to calculate a saving. These savings rates are based off the median saving rates under each category from the School Buying Hubs, so vary by category. Rates from the School Buying Hubs are used due to a lack of a statistically significant sample of cases from GHBS. This will be resolved once more level 3 – 5 cases are completed in GHBS. Data from the School Buying Hubs and exit surveys provides an estimate of what proportion of users go on to actively take-up the advice. This proportion is then applied to the total estimated saving amount outlined above to provide an adjusted, lower estimate to account for schools who do not benefit from the advice.

To ensure savings under these cases are not over-estimated, the maximum saving amount is capped at the value of the top 1% threshold of such cases, i.e. it cannot be higher than this amount.

Schools can also use the 'Create a Specification' tool to help write catering or multifunctional devices specifications. The reported figures do not include any savings made by schools from using the tool.

#### **Data Quality**

Data is continually logged and collected via an internal Case Management System whereby procurement specialists input data relating to each case, including the request made by schools, estimated case value and benchmarks, rationale for benchmark price, and saving estimates for all 'realised' cases. The DfE has instant access to this data and is processed regularly to calculate estimated savings. Should any alterations be made to cases logged on the system, including data relating to savings, estimates will be updated.

As outlined above, the methodology for estimating savings from level 1 and 2 cases is dependent on various data points and all caveats should be considered. As more level 3 to 5 cases are processed, this will give more rounded data on category level saving rates, enabling for better estimates when calculating level 1 and 2 cases.

### **RPA**

#### Methodology

RPA member savings are calculated by taking the difference between average RPA member insurance spend against the baseline insurance spend of £57.67 per pupil min 13/14 (pre-RPA introduction). This figure is multiplied by the number of pupils covered by the RPA in academies to calculate the overall saving for the year.

The average RPA member spend in 20/21 was £24.85 per pupil. This figure is assumed to be the cost of RPA at £19 per pupil plus other commercial insurance not currently covered by the RPA, which will vary between schools.

The RPA has delivered savings to non-members academies through its market shaping effect on the commercial market. These saving are estimated in the same way by taking the difference between average non-member spend, against the baseline spend of £57.67 and multiplying it by the number of pupils in academies not covered by the RPA. The average RPA non-member spend was £26.64 per pupil in 21/21.

Local authority maintained member saving is calculated using the same approach as academy member spend. Academy member spend values (as quoted above) are used as proxy. This figure is multiplied by the number of pupils covered by the RPA in LAMs to calculate the overall saving for the year.

Savings are calculated each year based on latest RPA membership data and academy information from GIAS. Spend figures are taken from the 'Academies Account Return' (AAR) data collection.

#### **Data Sources and Quality**

Academy Account Return (AAR) – School level expenditure data, spend data calculated from 'Other insurance Spend' Category.

RPA membership data – Administrative data used to support the running of the RPA service.

Get Information About Schools (GIAS) – Register of school information, used to calculate number of open academies each year.



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