



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

# **Building school and trust business professional capability**

**December 2023**

# Contents

Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction	5
The School and Trust Business Professional strategy	5
Snapshot of evidence of school and trust business professionals	6
Next Steps	6
2. Importance of building school and academy trust business capability	8
Context	8
The size of the school and academy trust business profession	8
The importance of school and academy trust business capability	9
3. Evidence of the profession's capability and professionals' needs	13
Sources of evidence	13
Key findings about the profession's capability and needs	13
4. The impact of our support on financial and business capability	18
Responsibility of employers	18
Targeted bursary programmes for school business managers (SBMs) and chief financial officers (CFOs)	18
Mentoring programme for CFOs and chief operating officers (COOs)	19
School Resource Management Advisers (SRMAs)	20
Funded continuing professional development (CPD) training webinars	20
Specialist training on school/academy trust business functions	21
Conclusion	22
Annexes	23
Annex A – Sources of further support and guidance	23
Annex B – School and trust business professional qualifications (printable version)	24
Annex C – Analysis of department's support for school and trust business professional capability to date	26
1. School resource management (SRM) training webinars	26
2. Pilot qualification programme for new or aspiring finance leads	29
3. Mentoring programme for new or aspiring business leaders	33
4. Contract management pilot training	37
Annex D – Methodology of evidence collections	42

## Executive Summary

School and trust business professionals have a critical role in ensuring pupils receive an outstanding education.

[The School Resource Management \(SRM\) Strategy: Building A Stronger System](#) was published in June 2022 and outlined our support for school and trust business professional capability, capacity, and recognition to achieve excellent resource management.

This report provides an update on the latest evidence around the financial and business capability of the sector, the impact of our current support and next steps.

Section 1 introduces the approach the department is taking to support school and trust business professional capability. It outlines **survey data** and how the department is currently working in **partnership** with sector organisations and professionals to provide support.

Section 2 summarises the evidence on **why** the department is supporting school and academy trust leaders to invest in their business professionals.

Section 3 outlines what school and trust business professionals have told us they **need**, using evidence mainly from the School Business Professional (SBP) surveys.

Section 4 outlines our current **offer of support** which will continue to be developed in partnership with the sector and includes:

- i. SRM webinars
- ii. Qualification bursaries
- iii. A mentoring scheme
- iv. Contract management training

Key achievements to date include:

- The provision of training webinars to over 9,000 professionals from 2020 to 2023. Of those surveyed last year, 91% felt the training better equipped them in their role.
- Of bursary recipient respondents, 100% said their knowledge had improved from the financial and operational qualification.
- Almost 75% of mentees implemented changes or improvements in their school or academy trust because of their mentoring support.

Section 4 also outlines **how employers can further develop** their school and trust business professionals.

The report concludes by outlining sources of support for school and trust business professional capability building.

We will continue to work together in partnership with the sector and develop an even stronger education system to ensure a successful future for our young people.

This report is for:

- **School and trust business professionals.** For awareness of how the department is investing in professionals' capability and sources of further support.
- **Leaders, governors, academy trust trustees, and professional HR staff in schools and academy trusts.** For awareness about professional development options for employees.
- **Providers of school and trust business professional development.** To provide information to help inform their own product and service development.
- **Public bodies and the public.** For those with responsibility for assessing public expenditure, for transparency on the department's investment.

# 1. Introduction

In this report, we outline how the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) (hereafter, the department) are supporting school and academy trust business capability in response to evidence about professionals' needs, why this is important to the education sector, and the impact of our support to date.

## The School and Trust Business Professional strategy

The department's aim, outlined in the School Resource Management (SRM) Strategy, is "for every school and academy trust to be led by those with the skills, knowledge and capacity to achieve excellent school resource management".<sup>1</sup> To achieve this we:

- support school leaders, executive leaders, school and trust business professionals, and boards to access opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge as part of building excellent school business capability.
- support schools and academy trusts to build a rewarding, positive and inclusive culture for business professionals.

This report focuses on progress toward the first of these commitments. We will report on the second commitment in due course.

We are also reporting progress on wider SRM projects outlined in [SRM GOV.UK](#) and have set out our plans in a [monitoring progress and impact of the strategy](#) note.

Staffing and decisions about professional development are the responsibility of school and academy trust leaders and their governors and/or trustees. This reflects that leaders are best placed to make decisions on staff and the skills and knowledge required to meet their organisations' needs.

Our strategy recognises that there is a role for the department in supporting both employers to meet this responsibility and professionals to meet their development needs. There are a range of issues that are affecting the demands placed on schools and academy trusts. These include societal and technological changes, as well as structural changes to the school system. The department is committed to supporting school and academy trust leaders, governors and trustees, and business professionals through these changes.

The approach the department has taken to meet the first SRM strategy aim has been to collect evidence from professionals to identify where we can best target support. This has been achieved through wide-ranging and representative surveys, recognising the breadth of school and trust business professional roles and experiences. Information is provided

---

<sup>1</sup> [School resource management: building a stronger system](#)

throughout this report. However, a snapshot of the latest available evidence is provided below.

The department is in many cases facilitating sector bodies or organisations to meet professionals' needs, by building on existing initiatives where they exist.

## Snapshot of evidence of school and trust business professionals

	All	School Business Manager	Chief Financial Officer
Qualified to Level 7 or higher	41%	22%	71%
Qualified to Level 6 or higher	62%	49%	83%
Qualified to Level 5 or higher	69%	58%	87%
Qualified to Level 4 or higher	87%	85%	95%
6 or more years' experience	74%	72%	79%
4 or more days CPD	61%	53%	74%
Intention to continue working as a SBP for at least the next 3 years	63%	61%	69%

## Next Steps

Going forward, beyond the impact of the initiatives summarised in this report, we will:

- Continue to fully fund online SRM webinars in 2023-24 across a range of financial, business and operational modules.
- Continue to provide a small number of targeted bursaries each year for new or aspiring chief financial officers in academy trusts that may not otherwise be reasonably expected to prioritise or fund such professional development. We will publish information on the SRM training and support [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) shortly.
- Following completion of a pilot bursary scheme of a level 5 school business manager (SBM) qualification for new or aspiring school business leaders, we will

publish findings on its impact and next steps for supporting uptake of SBM qualifications.

- Explore how to improve uptake to high-level qualifications offered on the market and ensure these are fit for purpose, including through the apprenticeship route.
- Continue to fund targeted mentoring relationships for less experienced or new staff to learn from experienced peers. This is being delivered as part of the School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA) programme from 2023-24.
- Make contract management training, developed by the Cabinet Office, available to school and trust business professionals free of charge at the foundation level. We will continue to support practitioners working on procurement to network through learning communities following the training.
- Work with professionals and sector organisations to explore launching a SBP Training Directory, so professionals have a live view of which sector organisations offer professional development support.
- Explore options to provide SBP Networks, on the SBP Network Directory on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), access to practical training and support at local network events.

## 2. Importance of building school and academy trust business capability

In this section, we outline why it is important to invest in those that support or lead the financial and operational management in schools and academy trusts, delivering the foundations on which children can receive an outstanding, safe and well-rounded education.

### Context

The department is responsible for the distribution of school funding and providing oversight and overall assurance that public funds are properly spent and provide value for money. Management of school funding is delegated locally, meaning schools and academy trusts are responsible for managing significant amounts of public money – total expenditure in local authority maintained schools was £23.9bn<sup>2</sup> in 2021 to 2022, and total expenditure in academy trusts was £35.9bn<sup>3</sup> in 2020 to 2021. It requires knowledge and skill to manage such funding compliantly and sustainably.

Schools and academy trusts also fulfil other business and operational responsibilities. Non-staff expenditure in local authority maintained schools was £5.1bn<sup>4</sup> in 2021 to 2022 and other operating costs were £11.4bn<sup>3</sup> in academy trusts in 2020 to 2021. It is important to get best value from resources, supported by schools and academy trusts having access to appropriate levels of procurement capability.

School and academy trust business staff often support, if not lead, responsibility for HR and talent management of staff. In November 2022 (2022/23), 973,900 full-time equivalents were working in state-funded schools in England,<sup>5</sup> of which 48% were teachers and 29% were teaching assistants. Effective management of the school estate also requires different skills and competencies, including across school and academy trust business staff.

### The size of the school and academy trust business profession

Evidence shows that the majority of schools and academy trusts appoint school and/or trust business professionals. There were 10,005 (8,930 FTE) school business managers (SBMs) and 6,788 (5,374 FTE) finance officers reported in schools in the School

---

<sup>2</sup> [LA and school expenditure, Financial year 2021-22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Academies consolidated annual report and accounts: 2020 to 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Create your own tables, Table Tool – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [School workforce in England, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)



Workforce Census (2022), in addition to 5,826 (5,145) premises managers, 5,320 (4,742 FTE) office managers, 1,948 (1,819 FTE) ICT network managers, and 1,948 (1,596 FTE) bursars.<sup>6</sup> In response to the SBP Survey 2023, almost three-quarters of SBMs reported themselves or another school business professional as being members of the school's leadership team.

Business professionals who are employed in a central academy trust team are not currently included in the School Workforce Census. The department is exploring this issue.

We know from other sources that there are growing numbers of specialist and senior roles in the academy trust sector. First, academy trusts must appoint a Chief Financial Officer (CFO)<sup>7</sup> – the vast majority report that they or another professional in their academy trust are members of academy trust leadership teams.<sup>8</sup> Second, of respondents to the SBP Survey 2021 almost 40% of academy trusts recruited procurement managers or officers in central teams.<sup>9</sup> Third, respondents to the SBP Survey 2023 included Trust Business Managers and Chief Operating Officers.

## **The importance of school and academy trust business capability**

Given the majority of schools and academy trusts recruit business professionals, these roles have been the initial focus of the department's support for capability building to meet the first aim of the SRM Strategy (page 5). Going forward, we will explore the case for support for other school and academy trust leadership and governance roles.

The remainder of this section explores why it is important for schools and academy trusts to have access to the right levels of business capability.

### **Integrated curriculum and financial planning**

Evidence of schools and academy trusts' financial positions broadly indicates good financial management.<sup>10</sup> However, there have been additional cost pressures since this latest published data, which the department is due to report on shortly. By 2024-25, the department is set to have provided over £9.8 billion more through the core schools budget than in 2021-22. This additional funding will help school leaders to continue to

---

<sup>6</sup> Overall School Workforce Census findings: [School workforce in England, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-reporting-year-2022)

<sup>7</sup> As outlined in the Academy Trust Handbook, 1.38.

<sup>8</sup> 94% of academy trust CFOs were reported as members of academy trust leadership teams (SBP Survey 2023).

<sup>9</sup> [Survey of school business professionals: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/survey-of-school-business-professionals-2021)

<sup>10</sup> In 2021-22 and 2020/21 respectively, 91.2% of maintained schools and 97.4% of academy trusts had a cumulative surplus or zero balance. [Academy trust revenue reserves 2020 to 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/academy-trust-revenue-reserves-2020-to-2021).

invest in the areas that we know positively impact educational attainment, as well support schools to manage higher costs. Maintaining and building the financial and business skill and knowledge in the sector is important so that school funding continues to be managed well and used effectively to best meet pupils' needs.

As well as good management, how school funding is used to deliver the curriculum is vitally important. The pupil to teacher ratio has been stable in recent years, although it was up slightly in 2022/23 from the previous year across phases. In secondary education there has been an upwards trend since 2013/14 owing to a larger pupil population moving through the system.<sup>11</sup> The average primary and secondary class sizes have increased by 0.1 from last year.<sup>12</sup> The work of school and trust business professionals supports such values and metrics, for example through good integrated curriculum and financial planning and multi-year budgeting, strategic workforce planning to implement good HR practices, and effective procurement to get best value from non-staff spend and reinvest in the school workforce.

### Value for money

Schools and academy trusts are expected to achieve best value from resources. There are benefits by undertaking training on financial practices<sup>13</sup> and an evaluation of a previous SBM qualification programme, identified the following benefits:<sup>14</sup>

- **Cost savings.** Estimated net benefits were £152m across 7 years, including procurement efficiencies of £72m and income generation of £32m.
- **Time savings.** Between 20 to 33% of headteachers' time was saved by reallocating tasks based on school business roles and responsibilities.
- **Non-financial benefits.** These included making more efficient and effective use of physical resources, including premises and IT, in schools.

These benefits were accrued at school-level. The evaluation also found that similar benefits were achieved where clusters of schools formed to share school business expertise. It should be noted that this evaluation was published in 2010. The findings are shared here to illustrate types of benefits that have been found previously, not to suggest that such benefits can continue to be extrapolated across the sector. First, many of these savings will only be achievable once; second, these studies pre-date the Academies Act 2010, so the types of benefits and how they are accrued will be different now. However, this evidence is useful because the same qualifications continue to be available from

---

<sup>11</sup> [School workforce in England, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

<sup>12</sup> [Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

<sup>13</sup> [School resource management tools and resources: formative evaluation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<sup>14</sup> [School business management: a quiet revolution - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

providers and used by current school business managers (more information is available in annexes A and B).

We will work with sector organisations to support a new, growing body of evidence and research into what works well in school and academy trust business and finance practices and capability building.

## **Trends impacting school and academy trust finance and operations**

### **Multi-academy trusts (MATs)**

As outlined in the Academies Regulatory and Commissioning Review,<sup>15</sup> we “want to ensure all pupils and schools benefit from being in a high-quality multi-academy trust”. DfE published trust quality descriptors in July 2023, which include 6 themes for Finance and Operations.<sup>16</sup>

These changes will result in, at a minimum, more academy trust CFOs, and likely other roles too, given developments in organisational structures of existing academy trusts to date (page 9). It is important that professionals that are already in the sector and those intending to join the sector have routes to upskill to meet these new responsibilities, and that employers have routes and support for recruiting and retaining professionals in emerging roles to fulfil school and trust business professional roles.

### **School-based professionals**

Schools need to have access to appropriately qualified and experienced professionals, who continue to have high-quality professional development. Regarding maintained schools, the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS), requires that “schools need access to staff with a high level of financial management competencies because of the complexity of financial management. Most schools will employ these staff themselves, but some smaller schools may share staff or buy in services”. Regarding multi-academy trusts, there are different approaches to the continued deployment of school-based professionals. For example, 24% of MAT respondents to the SBP Survey 2021 reported having a school business manager in every school, 30% in some schools, 24% in the central team only and 22% without this role. Therefore, as well as support for new roles, support for existing roles is essential.

### **Societal and technological changes**

DfE’s sustainability and climate change (S&CC)<sup>17</sup> vision is for the UK to be the world-leading education sector in S&CC by 2030. This includes ‘operations and supply chains’, encompassing, for example buying, estate management, data collection. DfE also

---

<sup>15</sup> [Academies regulatory and commissioning review](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Commissioning high-quality trusts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Sustainability and climate change strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

recently published a statement on generative artificial intelligence (AI), highlighting opportunities, for example reduced workload, and challenges, such as data security.

Both areas will involve new ways of working, with implications for school financial and operational planning. There is therefore a need to support school and trust business professionals, among others, to acquire new and develop existing skills and knowledge.

### 3. Evidence of the profession’s capability and professionals’ needs

This section summarises evidence from departmental and sector-led surveys about professionals’ needs.

#### Sources of evidence

We have collected evidence over the past two years through the School Business Professional (SBP) surveys<sup>18</sup> and analysed SRM Self-Assessment Checklist (SRMSAC)<sup>19</sup> responses. The SBP Survey 2023 has informed the majority of the findings in this section of the report. We received 1,168 responses, with the largest respondents by role being School Business Managers (504) and Chief Financial Officers (367). This has involved collecting representative sample survey data where possible to take account of views from a wide range of professionals. Where qualification figures are used, these are percentages of the exact number of respondents by role. We need to be mindful of differences by phase and will be reporting a further breakdown of SBP Survey (2023) findings soon. We also consulted on our strategic approach with local SBP networks between December 2022 and July 2023, including issuing a ‘SBP Engagement Survey’ which had 92 responses.<sup>20</sup>

We have supplemented our findings with evidence collected by the Institute for School Business Leadership (ISBL), who issued 2 surveys to their membership regarding professional development and apprenticeships.

The methodology of our sources of evidence is provided in annex d.

#### Key findings about the profession’s capability and needs

##### **1. Evidence suggests a majority of school and trust business professionals have appropriate levels of qualification and/or experience to fulfil their roles, but a sizeable minority do not.**

The ISBL professional standards<sup>21</sup> outline that a School Business Manager (SBM) should typically be qualified to at least level 4. If reporting to the senior leadership team in a school or academy trust this should be levels 5 to 6. Of SBM respondents to the SBP Survey 2023, 85% were qualified to at least Level 4, and 58% to at least level 5.

---

<sup>18</sup> The SBP Survey (2021) is available here: [Survey of school business professionals: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101422/sbp-survey-2021-report.pdf) and the 2023 report will be published shortly.

<sup>19</sup> The SRMSAC is a mandatory return for academy trusts with an open academy on 31 December each year, which supports financial management and governance. SRMSAC findings are outlined in the report.

<sup>20</sup> This will not be published as this is ad-hoc and informal evidence gathering. Updates and how it is informing practice are outlined in this report.

<sup>21</sup> [ISBL Professional Standards — ISBL](https://www.isbl.org.uk/professional-standards)

Of those not qualified to level 4, 51% had 6 or more years' experience, and of those not qualified to level 5 this was 68%. Experience is important as well as qualifications: in response to the SBP Survey 2023, 57% of professionals said experience is completely essential for meeting their current responsibilities, and 41% said it was nice to have.

For SBMs who have not yet achieved a relevant professional qualification, there is good capacity in the market to do so including the Level 4 Diploma for School Business Managers and Level 4 School Business Professional Apprenticeship. Uptake of Level 5 or 6 SBM qualifications are lower, which we plan to investigate through research into professionals' capability needs and barriers to uptake of CPD (such as funding, capacity, availability) in 2024.

Academy trusts must appoint an appropriately qualified and/or experienced chief financial officer (CFO),<sup>22</sup> which 97% of academy trusts reported that they do through the SRMSAC, and larger academy trusts are encouraged to consider accountancy qualifications. While we do need to exercise caution when using SRMSAC data due to it being self-reported, we have compared findings to the SBP Survey 2023 to give us more confidence on overall findings about the sector's capability, particularly level of qualification. CFO qualifications are typically reported at Level 6 or 7 chartered status. Of CFO respondents to the SBP Survey 2023, 83% were qualified to at least Level 6 and 71% to at least Level 7. In academy trusts with more than 3,000 pupils, this was 90% and 80% respectively. Of those not qualified to level 6 or 7, the vast majority (94%+) had 6 or more years' experience.

For CFOs who have not yet achieved a professional qualification and wish to, there is good capacity in the market, including the CIPFA ISBL School Financial and Operational Leadership diploma, which the majority of professionals in the academy sector who have received a bursary to undertake have reported as being fit-for-purpose (annex C). Many CFOs are also reporting a range of accountancy qualifications as being appropriate.<sup>23</sup> The department aims to support education professional bodies, finance professional bodies (for example ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA or CIPFA) and other business professional bodies (for example CIPS, CIPD, IWFM) to work strategically and collaboratively to ensure the needs of a growing number of senior specialists and generalists in the education sector are being met.

## **2. By each SBP role, most schools and academy trusts did not look to recruit recently, but, of those that did, sizeable minorities struggled to.**

A previous survey of ISBL members found that a majority of professionals remain in the sector and their roles for many years (i.e., almost two thirds had been in post for 8 or more years).<sup>24</sup> In response to the SBP Survey 2023, a majority (63%) of professionals

---

<sup>22</sup> As outlined in the Academy Trust Handbook, 1.39.

<sup>23</sup> This includes accountancy qualifications offered by the ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA, CIPFA and ISBL.

<sup>24</sup> [ISBL School Business Professional Workforce Survey Report 2020](#)

want to continue working in the profession for at least the next 3 years. While professionals remaining in roles and gaining experience is a strength, we are aware of a risk from anecdotal feedback at stakeholder forums of not attracting new professionals.

In the 2023 SBP Survey, most schools and academy trusts had not sought to recruit for each type of the following school or trust business professional roles in the last 2 years: SBMs, CFOs, Chief Operating Officers (COOs), procurement or HR specialists. Where they had, to the best of their knowledge, the majority (71%) had not found it difficult to find suitable applicants but a sizeable minority of 29% had found it difficult.

Furthermore, we have received anecdotal evidence of issues with recruitment and attracting new entrants to the profession, including for wider roles involved in school and academy trust business, administrative and office responsibilities, which can have knock-on impacts on the capacity of aforementioned roles.

The most common difficulties for the minority of schools and academy trusts that had difficulties recruiting within each role in response to the SBP Survey (2023) were: a low number of applicants (88%), applicants lacking the required skills (63%) or experience (54%), and an inability to offer competitive or high enough salaries (59%).

### **3. Continuing professional development (CPD) is valued by school and trust business professionals, but large proportions have unmet training needs.**

The Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) states that CFOs and other key financial staff should maintain CPD and undertake relevant ongoing training. CPD is also a condition of ISBL membership, with an expectation to engage in at least 3 days of CPD a year.

Evidence shows that CPD and ongoing training are important:

- 69% of respondents to the SBP survey consider training to be essential to meet their responsibilities, which increases as respondents' length of career increases.
- Almost 90% of respondents to the SBP Strategy Engagement survey see CPD as being extremely important to their role.

Evidence also shows that there are issues concerning access to CPD. Of respondents to the SBP Survey 2023, 47% of SBMs took 3 or fewer days of CPD in the past year, as did 32% of Trust Business Managers, 28% of COOs and 26% of CFOs. Of 250 respondents to an ISBL survey, around a third said their CPD needs are not met and only around 1 in every 10 said they are very well met. Feedback from stakeholder groups suggests that available funding for, and pressure on budgets for training is causing issues, impacting the extent to which school and trust business professionals can develop their current skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, more than half of respondents to an ISBL survey wanted more training in finance, leadership, HR, procurement and estate management and about one third

wanted more on marketing / communications; almost 90% think it is important that training is tailored to levels of practice and 80% felt it is important to receive certification. Our evaluation of SRM Webinars has showed demand for in-person, practical training (annex C). This is irrespective of most professionals reporting high confidence against professional standards in the SBP Survey, indicating professionals' desire to improve their practice further.

#### **4. The majority of school and trust business professionals are interested in apprenticeships, but awareness of them is typically low.**

School business apprenticeships exist at levels 4, 6, and 7 (see annex B for more information). The apprenticeship levy is paid by local authorities and academy trusts with wage bills over £3 million, and apprenticeship training can be accessed by those with lower wage bills by paying 5% of the cost.

A majority of respondents to an ISBL survey on apprenticeships (71%) said they would consider doing an apprenticeship and almost all line managers (97%) said they would consider offering one. However, evidence on qualification uptake shows that uptake of apprenticeships is lower than equivalent paid-for courses.

The same survey found reasons for lower uptake included awareness (average awareness of school business apprenticeships was 41%) and time constraints (42%). A majority of respondents (66%) reported they would be more likely to undertake general finance apprenticeships if they were contextualised to the education sector. Anecdotal feedback has been shared with us about issues concerning off-the-job training and access to national professional qualifications, which we will explore further with sector organisations.

#### **5. The sector has a range of networking opportunities and networking is highly valued.**

There are 114 SBP Networks in the GOV.UK directory.<sup>25</sup> Professionals have told us that they value networking highly: 41% considered networking as essential and 55% as nice to have.

The organic growth of networks alongside formal professional bodies and sector organisations is a strength of the school and academy trust business profession and the department is grateful for the time that professionals dedicate, in many cases voluntarily, to leading or co-leading professional networks. We are actively exploring ways to recognise and reward the hard work of network chairs and co-chairs and incentivise engagement in networks, for instance through funding access to high-quality professional development opportunities for such groups.

---

<sup>25</sup> [Find a school business professional network - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)



The department holds quarterly meetings with SBP Network chairs at the National Network Leaders' Forum and with sector organisations at SRM feedback sessions. This provides a range of bodies the opportunity to hear updates that affect their roles, and the opportunity to feedback and raise questions or concerns on behalf of members. There may be further room for improvement, for example how widely publicised these opportunities for professionals to ensure their voices are heard are, publication of outcomes, and promoting sector leadership. There are some different approaches to such groups in comparable sectors, such as healthcare, which we will explore further with stakeholder groups.

## **6. Preliminary evidence suggests there are issues around school business professional performance management.**

Hays and ISBL have issued an Education Salary and Recruiting Trends survey over the past 2 years.<sup>26</sup> They found in 2022, that of a sample of 473 school and trust business professional roles (the majority selecting the School Business Manager job title as being the one that most closely reflects their current role), 56% of professionals across maintained schools and academies said their employer does not discuss career progression with them, either termly or annually.

This is of concern. More research and evidence are required across a representative survey of professionals, to further understand where and why this is an issue and what and how to remove barriers. The department will work with sector organisations on this as part of the second commitment of the first aim of the SRM Strategy (2022) (page 5).

We will continue to evaluate the evidence and consider how we could work with sector organisations to support employers and professionals with recruitment and retention.

---

<sup>26</sup> [Download the Education Salary & Recruiting Trends Guide 2023 | Hays](#)

## 4. The impact of our support on financial and business capability

This section summarises the impact of the department's current support for school and trust business professional capability in light of evidence in section 3.

A full analysis of each capability building initiative is in annex C.

### Responsibility of employers

It is the department's aim to support capability building of school and academy trust business professionals. Alongside this, developing skills and knowledge is a core responsibility of leaders and governance professionals in schools and academy trusts. This is outlined in existing published documents:

- The SFVS, for maintained schools, states that “schools should analyse the skills of staff with financial responsibilities to look for any gaps and identify any training and development needs. DfE’s example skills matrix provides one way to identify staff skills, and whether staff with relevant skills are well placed to use them”.<sup>27</sup>
- The Trust Quality Descriptions state that a high-quality academy trust “ensures every member of staff is effectively line managed to maintain high performance” and “actively encourages career progression opportunities across the trust”.<sup>28</sup>

To support this, we have signposted a range of resources and services in annexes A and B. We encourage school and academy trust leaders and governance professionals to consider using these resources as well as other opportunities.

### Targeted bursary programmes for school business managers (SBMs) and chief financial officers (CFOs)

Given findings in section 3 that a sizeable minority of professionals may not have access to appropriate levels of qualification or experience, between 2021-22 and 2022-23 the department piloted a targeted bursary programme for 31 new or aspiring CFOs in academy trusts, to test the suitability of the CIPFA ISBL School Financial and Operational Leadership qualification in supporting CFOs to acquire skills and knowledge for the role. The majority of bursary recipients were in a CFO role or equivalent (51.6%), followed by school business manager or equivalent (22.6%), operating officer or equivalent (12.9%), and finance manager or equivalent (9.7%).

---

<sup>27</sup> [Schools financial value standard \(SFVS\) and assurance statement - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/90442/sfvs_and_assurance_statement.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> [Commissioning high-quality trusts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/90442/trust_quality_descriptions.pdf)

Over half of pilot cohort have completed and been awarded the qualification at the time of publishing this report (64.5%). Of those who have completed post-course surveys to date,<sup>29</sup> all found the course content reflected the main aspects of their roles, 67% of respondents said their knowledge had highly or strongly improved following the training and learning that they have undertaken as part of the qualification, with 25% saying it had moderately improved. Over two thirds of respondents (67%) said the training had helped them to identify improvements leading to financial, time or other savings for schools or academy trusts to reinvest in their own priorities to best meet their pupils' needs. A full analysis is in annex C.

Of those who have not finished the qualification at the time of publishing this report (35.5%), 4 have received extensions, 4 have deferred to later cohorts, and unfortunately 3 have withdrawn from the course. This illustrates the challenges some professionals have found in completing the qualification, in particular the time commitment required alongside challenging roles. This reflects the importance of employer and line manager involvement in school and trust business professional development, and ensuring professionals have protected time and support in undertaking formal professional development.

At the time of publishing this report, the department is also piloting a targeted bursary programme for SBMs in schools, to test the suitability of the Level 5 qualification in helping to prepare SBMs to carry out school business leadership responsibilities and/or in preparedness for career progression into senior and/or leadership roles.

## **Mentoring programme for CFOs and chief operating officers (COOs)**

Given findings in section 3 that many professionals continue to have training needs, between 2021-22 and 2022-23 the department also piloted a fully funded CFO / COO mentoring scheme to pair 53 less experienced or new SBPs with experienced, expert peers. This recognises evidence in section 3 that professionals value experience and networking as highly as formal qualifications.

In total, 41 mentees (77.4%) completed the pilot programme, including 23 Chief Financial Officers, 10 School Business Managers and 4 Chief Operating Officers.

The mentoring pilot has proven very effective in supporting CFOs and COOs in gaining more confidence in skills and knowledge required for their roles. Of those who finished the programme, 78.1% rated their overall experience of it as excellent, 19.5% good, and only 2.4% poor. A majority agreed that having access to a mentor has made them

---

<sup>29</sup> From 60% of bursary recipients who have completed the qualification at the time of the publication.

more confident to work with other senior leaders (87.8%) and that having access to a mentor has helped them to take the next step in their career (58.5%).

Almost three quarters of mentees implemented changes or improvements in their academy trust's processes as a result of being mentored, of which almost two thirds said they have resulted, or will result, in monetary savings. Examples of changes included, "Increased use of metrics analysis. Improvements to our risk register and reporting to trustees. More informed budget setting for all involved" and, "My mentor signposted me to a networking group. I have now become a member of LASBM which I find really supportive".

## **School Resource Management Advisers (SRMAs)**

To further support school and trust business professional staff as well as those in other leadership roles, the department fully funds access to SRMAs, sector experts offering peer-to-peer support across the maintained and academy sectors.

SRMAs offer hands-on support to school leaders including SBPs, helping them to identify ways to maximise resources and introducing them to the benefits of integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP) where this is not already embedded. They also signpost to many other tools and resources that school leaders may not already be familiar with, supporting with building capability in the longer-term.

Ninety-one percent of organisations responding to our survey told us they found the experience of an SRMA visit good or very good and feedback included comments confirming that visits have helped deepen SBPs' knowledge and understanding of ICFP and other key areas of school business management.

## **Funded continuing professional development (CPD) training webinars**

In response to evidence about the profession's uptake of CPD, the department has fully funded sector training bodies to provide school resource management (SRM) webinars. This is to ensure that there is a universal, minimum CPD offer for all SBP roles. This has been informed by professionals' feedback, including SBP network leads and co-leads. Overall, the webinars have been attended by thousands of professionals and been found to have a positive impact on the knowledge and confidence of attendees.

Over the past 3 years, over 9,000 professionals across a range of roles including SBMs, CFOs and non-SBP roles, such as headteachers, (see annex C for a full breakdown) have attended at least one SRM webinar. The vast majority of professionals have reported that they helped to improve practice at their schools or academy trusts and that their confidence in the topics being covered significantly increased.

Of the sample of respondents to an end-of-course survey, just over nine in every ten felt the training better equipped them in their role and the same proportion that the training would have a positive impact on their school(s) or academy trust. There was an increase in overall average confidence across all 7 modules. The biggest increase in average confidence was for 'how to integrate curriculum and financial planning', followed by 'benchmarking financial metrics', and 'Strategic HR planning'.

We received feedback on continued training needs across finance, HR, procurement, and estate management. We also received feedback that there is a demand for workshop-style sessions where professionals can use their own data and work on a plan with future actions, and for interactive sessions with real-life examples and case studies, for example, "case studies or examples of real budgets that can be looked at with online training and gone through in a step-by-step way".

## **Specialist training on school/academy trust business functions**

In response to evidence about increasing numbers of specialist roles in the sector and the need for more training outlined in section 3, the department has piloted making contract management training, developed by the Cabinet Office for civil servants, available to school and trust business professionals. This is at two different levels – Foundation and Practitioner.

This is to ensure that there is a way for professionals responsible for contract management and procurement of different scale and complexity to access the training they need from low level to increasingly larger and/or more complex procurements.

One hundred and fifty-one participants from schools, single-academy trusts (SATs) and multi-academy trusts (MATs) have taken part in the foundation level contract management training. Twenty-six participants completed cohort 1 of the foundation level training between July and October 2022.

One hundred and twenty-five participants completed cohort 2 of the foundation level training between February and July 2023. Eighty-eight percent of participants from Cohort 1 who responded to the impact survey (with a response rate of 56%) and 79% from cohort 2 who responded (with a response rate of 87%) were satisfied with the training overall. Seventy-seven percent of cohort 1 and 96% of cohort 2 survey respondents felt that their knowledge and understanding of contract management had increased because of the training, and there is some evidence from follow-up interviews with participants from cohort 2 that they are beginning to put their knowledge to practice. Some felt that aspects of the training should be modified to school contexts.

## Conclusion

This report has outlined the impact of the department's current support for school and academy trust business capability building in response to available evidence. Our current support has had a positive impact on professionals' confidence, knowledge, and skills, and on positive expected impacts on their schools or academy trusts and pupils.

This goes some way towards achieving the first aim in the School Resource Management (SRM) Strategy, "for every school and academy trust to be led by those with the skills, knowledge and capacity to achieve excellent school resource management".<sup>30</sup>

The department will continue to support professionals and their employers through targeted bursaries, mentoring and access to continuing professional development opportunities across SRM topics, including procurement and contract management.

The department will also continue to work in partnership with the sector to support employers and sector bodies to access information to best meet school and trust business professionals' needs as part of effective, ongoing professional development.

Further information is provided in the annexes about where school and trust business professionals, their line managers and employers can access guidance and support.

---

<sup>30</sup> [School resource management: building a stronger system](#)

# Annexes

## Annex A – Sources of further support and guidance

The following are sources of further support for capability building of school and trust business professionals:

- A “School Resource Management: Training and Support” gov.uk page: [School resource management: training and support](#). This includes:
  - Links to training webinars funded or hosted by the department.
  - Information about sector organisations and their support for school and trust business professionals including professional development opportunities and ways for professionals to raise queries or issues. This includes information about: ASCL, CIPS, CIPFA, CST, ISBL, local authorities, NAHT, NGA and UNISON.
  - Details on generalist and specialist professional qualifications that are suitable for school and trust business professionals.
- The Institute for School Business Leadership sector-led professional standards: [ISBL Professional Standards — ISBL](#), available to access through free account registration.
- The “School Business Professional Network Directory”: [Find a school business professional network](#), highlighting sector-led networks overseen by current or ex-practitioners, some of which are free to join, some require small charges to join.
- Other networking opportunities are available through sector organisations, often as condition of membership, including ISBL local groups for school business professionals and CST professional communities for finance professionals and operations and HR professionals, or as part of training delivered by e.g., ASCL and NAHT. More information is available through the [SRM training and support gov.uk page](#).
- [Departmental guidance on effective workforce planning](#).
- A report conducted by Hays and ISBL into recruitment and workforce trends, including desired ways of working by school and academy trust business staff: [Download the Education Salary & Recruiting Trends Guide 2023 | Hays](#). Please note – the full report requires account registration to download; some headline findings have been shared in this document.

A printout of school and trust business professional qualifications is in annex B.

## Annex B – School and trust business professional qualifications (printable version)

Heading	Description	Audience	More information
<b>Qualifications (Generalist)</b>			
Level 4 Diploma for School Business Managers	This qualification supports School Business Managers to manage school resources more efficiently and effectively, evaluate the nature of school business operations within your school, and gain knowledge and skills in all aspects of the ISBL Professional Standards.	New or aspiring school business managers (SBMs).	<a href="#">Level 4 ILM Diploma for School Business Managers — ISBL</a>
Level 5 Diploma for School Business Leaders	This qualification supports School Business Managers and Leaders to develop their strategic knowledge to better understand and evaluate business operations within schools and academy trusts and to present evidence-based information to leadership and governance colleagues.	Experienced school business professionals (SBPs) who work closely with senior leadership teams.	<a href="#">Level 5 ILM Diploma for School Business Leaders — ISBL</a>
Level 6 Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship for Schools	This qualification covers: project and operations management in schools, school business leadership, transforming schools, change management in schools, strategic financial management in schools.	SBPs responsible for managing projects, tasks or people, including those who have graduate qualifications in disciplines other than business.	<a href="#">Level 6 Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) — ISBL</a>
Level 7 Senior Leaders Masters Degree Apprenticeship	Includes modules on: leadership and context, finance, strategy and resource, leading and managing change, consultancy skills, project management, education and sustainability.	SBPs who wish to enhance their senior leadership skills.	<a href="#">Level 7 Senior Leader (Degree) Apprenticeship — ISBL</a>
Certificate in Strategic Educational Leadership	A short (one term) level 7 module for school business professionals who want to demonstrate their strategic educational leadership.	SBPs progressing to senior or strategic roles.	<a href="#">Certificate in Strategic Educational Leadership — ISBL</a>



<b>Qualifications (Specialist)</b>			
<b>Finance and Operations</b>			
CIPFA, ISBL School Financial and Operational Leadership	This qualification aims to ensure that finance professionals in academy trusts can meet the highest professional standards when it comes to overseeing (amongst other things) finance, corporate governance, risk management and strategic procurement.	Current and aspiring chief finance and operations officers.	<a href="#">CIPFA Diploma in School Financial and Operational Leadership – ISBL</a>
<b>Procurement</b>			
CIPS Award for SBPs	A procurement and supply course, covering: driving value through procurement and supply, managing expenditures with suppliers, developing contracts in procurement and supply, sourcing essentials in procurement and supply, effective negotiation.	The programme is aimed at SBPs who need/want specialist procurement knowledge and skills.	<a href="#">ISBL (CIPS)</a>

# **Annex C – Analysis of department’s support for school and trust business professional capability to date**

## **1. School resource management (SRM) training webinars**

The department has fully funded training webinars for school and trust business professionals and other roles over the past 4 years. This analysis focuses on SRM webinars in 2022-23, that ran between December 2022 and March 2023.

### **1a. Purpose**

The webinars provide a universal, minimum training offer on topics related to effective school resource management. The purpose is to:

- Support SBPs to increase skills and knowledge across a range of resource management practices.
- Support other leaders in education with school finance or business responsibilities, and/or who work with SBPs.

### **1b. Approach**

In summer 2022, the department competitively tendered for an organisation to design and deliver training webinars in response to demand from the 2021-22 round of webinars. The full list of modules included:

- How to integrate curriculum and financial planning
- Benchmarking typical financial and curriculum metrics
- Budgeting and Annual Cycles
- Strategic Financial Planning
- Sustainable Procurement and Contract Management
- Strategic Estate Management
- HR Planning

An online webinar model was chosen for its flexibility over bookings and attendance, in response to time barriers to professional development that SBPs have reported.

### **1c. Impact**

Overall, 3,861 people attended at least one webinar, and over 4,300 webinars were attended in total.

We collected evidence in 3 ways. Firstly, from registrations to the webinar programme. Secondly, in response to short pre- and post-course assessments. Thirdly, in response to an end-of-course survey with a sample that aimed to be representative of the webinar attendees (n 208).

## **i. Demographic of attendees**

A majority of webinars were attended by school or academy trust business/finance managers or bursars (65.7%), with the next 3 biggest groups of attendees by role being CFO or COOs (11.1%), governors (4.7%) and headteachers / principals or deputy headteachers (4.7%).

Of attendees where school type and sector were identifiable from registrations, over 2,100 were from academies (55.2%) and over 1,700 from local maintained schools (44.8%).<sup>31</sup> Over 130 attendees were from special schools. Where school phase was identifiable, over 1,740 were from primaries (69.8%) and over 660 were from secondaries (26.6%).<sup>32</sup>

## **ii. Reflections on training**

In response to post-course assessments, 99% of respondents said the training matched the description provided, 94% said that their knowledge had increased as a result of the training and 99% would recommend the session to others.<sup>33</sup>

In response to pre- and post-course assessments,<sup>34</sup> respondents rated their confidence in the modules on a scale of 0 to 6<sup>35</sup>. There was an increase in overall average confidence across all 7 modules. The biggest increase in average confidence was for 'how to integrate curriculum and financial planning' from 3.6 pre-course to 5.4 post-course, followed by 'benchmarking financial metrics' from 3.7 to 5.2 (taken as an average across three benchmarking webinars by school phase and type)<sup>36</sup>, HR planning from 3.9 to 5.4, securing best value procurement from 4.0 to 5.5, estate management from 3.9 to 5.3, budgeting and annual cycles from 4.4 to 5.8, and strategic financial planning from 4.3 to 5.6.

The course provider's summary of the lowest confidence results was that these "generally relate to situations that have occurred within school and feeling confident in and regularly using key concepts. More time is needed to allow schools to embed and implement the skills learnt in the training."

---

<sup>31</sup> Academy breakdown: MATs: 1,086, 'academies': 838, SATs: 94, free schools: 83. Local authority breakdown: local authority maintained schools: 1,672. Federations: 32. Other: special schools: 134, independent schools: 15, Welsh schools: 3, colleges: 1, other: 0.

<sup>32</sup> The remainder: all-throughs (43, 2%), nurseries (33, 1%), middle schools (14), 16 plus (1).

<sup>33</sup> Of 2579 attendees who responded to these questions in the post-course assessment.

<sup>34</sup> 815 of the attendees completed confidence rating questions in pre- and post-course assessments.

<sup>35</sup> With 2 equalling Red, 4 equalling Amber and 6 equalling Green.

<sup>36</sup> Benchmarking financial metrics for primary schools saw an increase from 3.7 to 5.2, benchmarking for secondary schools from 3.8 to 5.3 and benchmarking for SEN/AP from 3.7 to 5.1.

### iii. Impact of learning

Of the sample of respondents to the end-of-course survey, 91% felt the training better equipped them in their role and the same proportion that the training would have a positive impact on their school(s) or academy trust. The 'strategic financial planning' and 'budgeting and annual cycles' modules received the highest proportion of respondents who didn't agreed with this. Feedback included, "would have preferred more in-depth training (delegates had 5+ years-experience)" and "would have preferred more live data and real working examples".

Furthermore, 67% of respondents believe the training will help them consider opportunities for financial savings. 34 respondents were able to identify savings, of which 17 could quantify these, identifying total savings of approximately £583,000. Other nonnumeric answers to this question included: 'better use of procurement', 'identifying areas of under and overspend', 'more cost effective purchases', 'altered how we use additional funds', 'better contract management', 'reducing inefficient use of staff' and 'restructuring'.

### iv. Suggestions

In the post-course survey, the following areas were requested for future webinars:

- Budgeting and financial planning (most requested).
- Support with cash flow, general and multi-year forecasting, tracking expenditure through the year, and dealing with a deficit budget.
- Funding streams and how to access them, bid writing and application support, conditions of grant funding, ways to maximise income/fundraising.
- HR/staff management: contracts, maximising staffing structure, payroll, managing people, managing difficult situations, well-being for staff, restructuring, staff planning, SEND staffing.
- Estate management: compliance, project management, risk, school improvement plan, contract management, Good Estate Management<sup>37</sup> guidance.
- Procurement: tendering, small school procurement, frameworks, regulations and legal requirements, VAT and trading subsidiaries, templates, examples.

In response to the end-of-course survey, other requested areas not listed above included: asset management plans, effective use of technology, disposing of digital technology safely, flexible working guidance, and decarbonisation.

In terms of approaches to training, the course provider reported the following requests:

---

<sup>37</sup> [Good estate management for schools - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools)

- Demand for workshop-style sessions to use their own data and work on a plan with future actions. For example, “It would be useful to attend ICFP workshops and other courses to give a more hands on and individual experience.”
- Interactive sessions with real-life examples and case studies. For example, “ICFP with outstanding examples” and “case studies or examples of real budgets that can be looked at with online training and gone through in a step-by-step way”.

Other feedback included on preferences over the timing of training, specific needs of different audiences (such as, governor-specific training, needs of those with more experience) and for specific training based on school phase, size and type.

## 2. Pilot qualification programme for new or aspiring finance leads

Between March 2021 and April 2022, the department invested in a pilot bursary scheme aimed at CFOs of academy trusts to undertake the CIPFA ISBL<sup>38</sup> Level 7 Diploma in School Financial and Operation Leadership. The department funded 75% of the cost of the qualification, with participants, or their schools / academy trusts, funding the remaining 25% of the cost.

### 2a. Purpose

The purpose of the pilot qualification programme was to:

- Support schools and academy trusts in, or at risk of, financial difficulty through helping their financial leads to acquire or develop skills and knowledge to lead strategic financial planning of academy trusts.
- Test and publicise the impact of the qualification, to generate awareness about its impact on knowledge and skill of financial practitioners in education.

### 2b. Approach

To ensure our investment met its intended purpose, participants were nominated by Regions Group and ESFA members of staff, who work together to support schools and academy trusts with financial management.<sup>39</sup>

The criteria for nominations were:

- **Aspiring financial leads:** those who are likely to take on a financial leadership role in the next 18 months. They may currently work in a maintained school or be a business professional in an existing academy trust.

---

<sup>38</sup> Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA) and Institute for School Business Leadership (ISBL).

<sup>39</sup> For more information on the [role of Regions Group and work with ESFA visit GOV.UK](#).

- **New or recently appointed CFOs:** those who have taken on the role in the last 18 months.
- **CFOs requesting greater support:** those who have, through working with Regions Group and/or ESFA territorial leads, requested further support to meet particular needs or challenges.

The pilot included 2 cohorts of 31 participants in total. The first cohort of 15 participants began the qualification in September 2021 and scheduled completion was October 2022. The second cohort of 16 participants began in January 2022 and scheduled completion was January 2023.

## 2c. Impact

Of the September 2021 to October 2022 cohort, 12 participants successfully completed their final assessment on time, 1 was granted an extension due to illness and has since successfully completed it and 2 withdrew from the course having left the profession.

Of the January 2022 to January 2023 cohort, 7 participants have successfully completed their final assessment at the time of this publication. Of the remaining 9, extensions have been granted for 4, 4 have deferred to a later cohort, and 1 has dropped out. Reasons for extensions and deferrals have primarily been caused by personal issues including illness and bereavement.

To assess the impact of the qualification programme, we issued pre- and post-course surveys to participants. We received 31 pre-course surveys (100%) and, to date, we have received 12 completed post-course surveys from 20 participants (60.0%) who have completed the qualification. We continue to request post-course surveys from those who are yet to return them, but some have since left the profession which make a 100 percent return unlikely.

### i. Demographic of participants

Of 31 bursary recipients, there were 15 different specific job role titles. When grouped by equivalent roles, the majority were already in the role of CFO (35.5%), followed by School Business Manager (22.6%), Head of Finance or Finance Director (16.1%), Finance Manager (9.7%), COO (6.5%), CFOO (6.5%), Bursar (3.2%).<sup>40</sup>

Of those who have completed the qualification, when grouped by equivalent roles the largest proportions by role are: 25.0% of CFOs, 25.0% School Business Managers, 15.0% Head of Finance or Finance Director, 10.0% COOs, 10.0% CFOOs, 10.0%

---

<sup>40</sup> Specific roles: CFO (32.3%), Business Manager (12.9%), COO (6.5%), Head of Finance (6.5%), Finance Director (6.5%), School Business Manager (6.5%), Finance and Business Manager (3.2%), Director of Finance (3.2%), Finance Manager (3.2%), CFOO (3.2%), Bursar (3.2%), Business and Operations Manager (3.2%), Interim Chief Financial Officer (3.2%), Director of Finance and Operations (3.2%), School Finance & Business Adviser (3.2%).

Finance Manager and 5.0% Bursar. It seems that there is no clear pattern of roles that are more or less likely to succeed in the course, albeit this is of a small sample and particularly small for some roles (such as, Business Manager and COO).

The majority of the bursary recipients in the pilot were from academy trusts (87.1%), with 3 maintained school participants and 1 from a diocesan education service overseeing a mix of academies and voluntary aided schools. The size of the academy trusts represented varied from 1 school to 34 schools, with a mean average size of 4.5 and median of 2. The majority of academy trust recipients were from single academy trusts (40.7%), with the next biggest group being from academy trusts with 2 schools (18.5%) and 3 schools (11.1%).<sup>41</sup>

## **ii. Reflections on course**

In response to post-course assessments, 100.0% of respondents said the course content was reflective of the main aspects of their roles.

66.7% of respondents said their knowledge had highly or strongly improved following the training and learning that they have undertaken as part of the qualification, with 25.0% saying it had moderately improved and 8.3% (1 respondent) not providing an answer to this question.

## **iii. Impact of learning**

In response to post-course assessments, 66.7% of respondents (8) said the training had helped them to identify improvements leading to financial, time or other savings for schools or academy trusts to reinvest in their own priorities to best meet their pupils' needs, while 33.3% of respondents (4) said it did not lead to any of these improvements. Across all 8 respondents who identified savings, 11 types of saving were identified including financial (36.4%), time (36.4%) and other (27.3%). These included:

- Review of contracts, such as photocopying, catering, maintenance insurance costs, now with risk protection arrangement (RPA).
- I think we can make savings around procurement, particularly in catering.
- Implement more financial planning linked to curriculum planning/timetable.
- Slimmed down Risk Register and made it fit for purpose is one example and this is easier for trustees and staff, as one example. I think how we present data will also change and be quicker to produce.
- Within procurement, setting up contracts with suppliers will save the trust time. I am expecting financial savings in the future too, but it is too soon to see if they materialise.

---

<sup>41</sup> 8 academy trusts (30%) had more than 3 schools: 4 schools (1, 3.7%), 7 schools (2, 7.4%), 9 schools (1, 3.7%), 10 schools (2, 7.4%), 11 (1, 3.7%), 34 (1, 3.7%).

- The training has altered my mindset so that my approach to work is more strategic. This is now driving processes and systems more efficiently and effectively.

## **2d. Changes to or new processes following completion of the qualification**

In response to post-course assessments, 100% said the training and learning enabled them to make changes to or develop new processes for the benefit of their school or academy trust (such as, reporting processes, data collection, risk management), including:

- More detailed tracking/analysis of data and review of procurement.
- Worked with Trust Board to devise and implement new risk register proforma and risk tracking/management cycle. New internal financial controls implemented across all trust schools. Centralisation of core finance and HR processes in the MAT to improve consistency and availability of documentation for audit trail.
- Contractor checks and creation of database, more double checking of prices for smaller purchases.
- I have looked at the procurement processes and in particular the amount of suppliers we use, I have started to reduce this and have been in communication with suppliers about the possibility of having contracts with them for the trust, I have also used the DfE framework when comparing prices for goods, which I have never used before.
- The changes have been around governance, ICFP and managing risk. Those were the areas that I really needed to develop. I felt that I have and we are beginning to develop within these areas within our MAT.
- Different ways of budgeting – different scenarios for better / worse outcomes, different types of reporting for directors.
- Risk management controls and procurement strategy.
- ICFP more effectively. Robust clear MIS.
- My relationship with the Chair of our Audit Committee. Improvements to Contract Management.
- The main changes have been around governance and compliance. I have completed a full review of the financial information that is shared with the trustees and explored with my mentor different options of sharing information to ensure the requirements of the ATH are being met. Assisted the board with the completion of a full skills audit and suggested ways in which skills gaps can be filled I have led a training session with the recently restructured Resources Committee where the 'musts' of the AFH were explained I have supported the new Chair of Trustee's with the resourcing of training and development opportunities for new and existing trustees.
- Year end audit checklists, better management accounts reports and presentation.



### 3. Mentoring programme for new or aspiring business leaders

During 2021-22 and 2022-23, the department invested in a pilot CFO and COO mentoring scheme to support CFOs and COOs to develop their skills and knowledge in effective management of academy finances.

#### 3a. Purpose

The purpose of the pilot mentoring programme was to:

- Support CFOs and COOs in need of additional support from experienced peers to increase confidence in achieving effective financial management across the academy trust.
- Test and publicise the impact of the mentoring programme, to generate awareness about its impact on knowledge and skill of financial practitioners in education.

Running this programme at a similar time to the bursary programme (see section 2) has enabled comparisons between the impact of each.

#### 3b. Approach

Participants for the CFO and COO mentoring programme were nominated by Regions Group and ESFA members of staff.<sup>42</sup>

The criteria for nominations were:

- CFOs or COOs who would particularly benefit from this opportunity for development, for example from schools or academy trusts in financial difficulty.
- Aspiring CFOs or COOs: those who are likely to take on the role in the next 12 months.
- New/recently appointed CFOs or COOs: those who have taken on the role in the last 18 months.

We received 53 nominations in total. More mentees preferred to start in the spring term due to relatively higher workload in the autumn term. Therefore, there were 21 mentees in cohort 1 (autumn 2021) and 32 mentees in cohort 2 (spring 2022).

We tendered for a provider to deliver the programme in March 2021. This included recruiting and selecting mentors, developing a framework and materials, and

---

<sup>42</sup> For more information on the role of Regions Group and work with ESFA: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regional-department-for-education-dfe-directors/about>.

overseeing project management. The successful bidder was the Institute for School Business Leadership (ISBL).

To deliver the programme, ISBL utilised existing School Resource Management Advisers (SRMAs) and recruited new mentors through a rigorous recruitment process to achieve enough capacity for a minimum of 50 pairings. Mentors attended a live induction event to help with their preparation for mentoring. Mentors received regular professional development via monthly training sessions delivered by a senior and experienced SRM instructor.

To begin the mentoring mentee relationship, individual priority areas were agreed. Common priority areas included:

- Financial planning and budget monitoring
- Financial compliance and governance
- School Resource Management underpinned by Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning
- Benchmarking and financial forecasting using DfE tools and other commercial solutions

Less frequent but additional areas included: leadership, risk management, asset management, procurement, recruitment and retention, infrastructure and estate management, special schools / alternative provision.

Each mentee had an action plan, which set out the requirement for 3 measurable goals for the mentoring relationship agreed at the first meeting. Furthermore, mentees completed a self-assessment against the identified development areas, coupled with the nomination form used in the matching process.

### **3c. Impact**

In total, 41 mentees (77.4%) completed the programme. To assess the impact of the mentoring programme, we issued pre- and post-course surveys to participants. To date, we have received completed surveys from all 41 participants and 2 participants who did not complete the programme.

#### **i. Demographic of attendees**

Those who completed the programme included 23 Chief Financial Officers, 10 School Business Managers, 4 Chief Operating Officers and 4 Finance Directors.

#### **ii. Reflections on mentoring programme**

A majority of mentees rated the programme favourably (see figure 1).

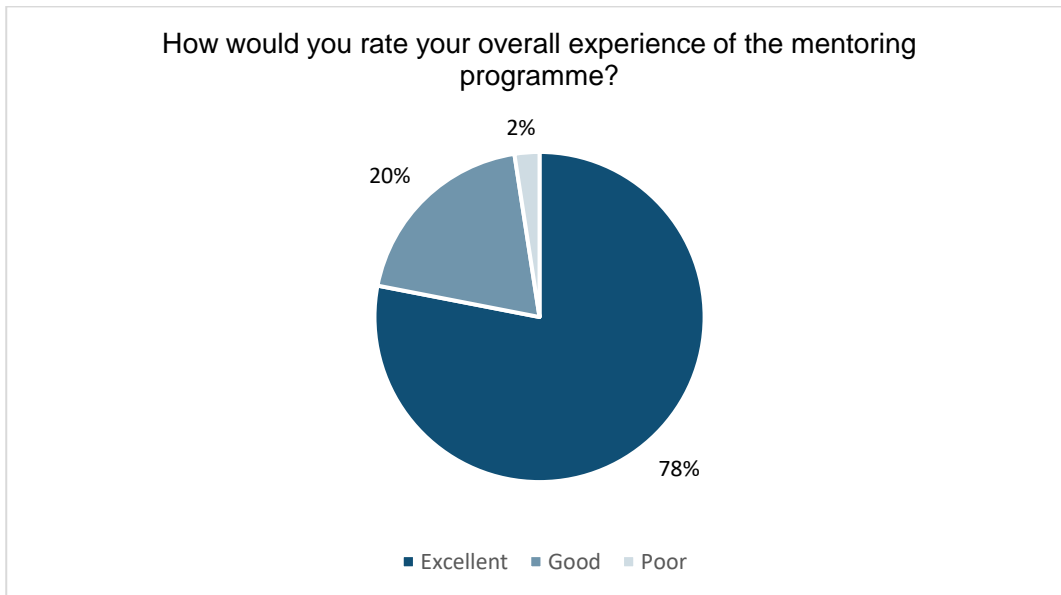


Figure 1. CFO / COO mentoring programme overall evaluation

A vast majority found both having an action plan helpful in monitoring progress against agreed goals (95.1%) and having a self-assessment helpful in identifying areas for development (92.7%).

A large majority agreed that having access to a mentor has made them more confident to work with other senior leaders (87.8%) and that having access to a mentor has helped them to support other leaders in their trust to develop and grow (75.6%).

A small majority agreed that having access to a mentor has helped them to take the next step in their career (58.5%).

### iii. Impact of learning

Almost three quarters of mentees (73.2%) implemented changes or improvements in their academy trust's processes as a result of being mentored. A selection of these included:

- “Introducing ICFP and other benchmarking tools has been a huge bonus particularly in the budget-setting period. Launching a school offices reorganisation to standardise staffing, competencies and professionalism of support in all schools.”
- “The quality of information provided to trustees has improved. A more efficient and productive finance team. Increased use of metrics analysis. Improvements to our risk register and reporting to trustees. More informed budget setting for all involved.”
- “My mentor signposted me to a networking group. I have now become a member of LASBM which I find really supportive”
- “Capital works planning and SCA prioritisation.”

- “Better understanding of ICFP, shared the documentation with the Trust as part of our Budget presentation and I have been asked to demo/ walk it through at the next Trust SBM meeting to share the good practice. In turn, this should help each school to be open in their reflection of their budget and how it compares to similar benchmarking from DFE, VMFI and ISBL efficiency factors.”

Almost two thirds (63.3%) of those that said they have implemented changes or improvements said these have resulted, or will result, in monetary savings for their school(s) or academy trust.

A selection of identified savings included:

- “£50,000 will be saved by using the Teaching Vacancies Service.”
- “Re-negotiated Broadband & TeleComms, MIS and MSP contracts. Savings over 5 years of £330k.”
- “More efficient use of finance team time, making savings on overtime costs and the potential unnecessary recruitment. Savings approx. £30K which we invested in new budget and management reporting software.”
- “The new ICFP format has potential in providing savings, highlights areas of overspend with evidence and focuses how staffing in particular is best structured and utilised.”
- “Savings have been achieved by reviewing the proposed staffing structure for next year and taking action prior to the recruitment process.”

## 4. Contract management pilot training

Since July 2022, 151 participants from schools, single-academy trusts (SATs) and multi-academy trusts (MATs) have taken part in the foundation level contract management training developed by the Cabinet Office for civil servants. 26 participants completed the training as part of Cohort 1, and 125 participants completed the training in July 2023 as part of Cohort 2. The foundation training is a free to access online, self-study course comprised of 7 modules covering multiple aspects of effective contract management. The main purpose of the training is to help participants better manage contracts and relationships with suppliers so they can get the best value for money.

### 4a. Purpose

The purpose of the pilot was to test:

- Whether the training is fit for purpose for the school sector.
- Whether participation in the training increases participants' knowledge and understanding of good contract management practices.
- Whether participation in the training increases participants' confidence in managing their contracts effectively and compliantly.
- Whether schools and MATs are getting better value for money because of the training.

### 4b. Approach

The pilot launched in July 2022, when 26 participants undertook the foundation level training as a pre-requisite to enrolment on the practitioner level training. Twenty-four continued onto the practitioner training, 16 learners were active at the time of writing.

The second foundation level training pilot launched at the end of February 2023. We received over 430 expressions of interest. Three hundred and forty learners submitted the pre-course survey, required as part of the terms of engagement to enable access to the Cabinet Office online platform for content. One hundred and eighty learners were active on the course, and 125 completed the course in July 2023.

Through the foundation level training the learners completed 7 modules: risk management, stakeholder engagement, change control, exit and transition, managing contract delivery, procurement and mobilisation, and design and ongoing development.

### 4c. Impact

Cohort 1 of the foundation level training was evaluated using pre- and post-training surveys, and a follow-up survey to measure longer-term outcomes and impacts 6 months after completion of the training.

Twenty-six participants completed cohort 1 of the foundation level training between July and October 2022. The impact survey, sent out 6 months after the end of the training in April 2023, was completed by 14 of the participants (53.8% response rate).

One hundred and twenty-five participants completed cohort 2 of the foundation level training between February and July 2023. One hundred and nine participants completed both the pre-and post-survey (87.2% response rate). The impact survey is due to be sent out in early 2024. To obtain more in-depth information about the potential impacts of the programme ahead of the impact survey, 3 participants who completed the training were interviewed at the end of August 2023 by our in-house evaluator.

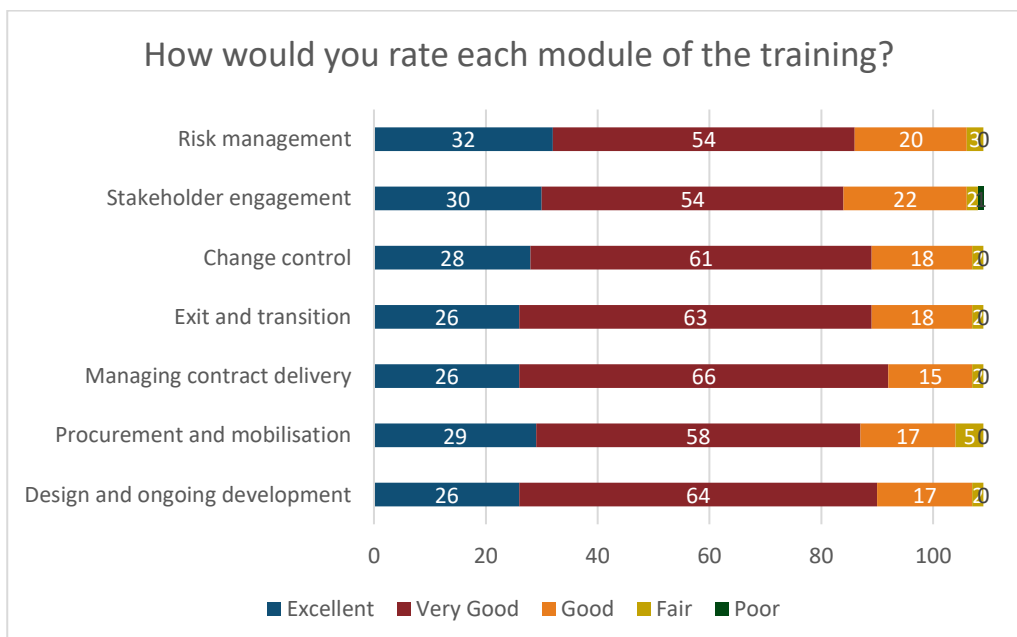
#### iv. Demographics

Participants who completed the training were staff with responsibilities for contracts based within either a MAT central team, SAT or individual schools that are members of MATs. Participants' job titles include: Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO), Head of Procurement, Head of Estates, School Business Manager, School Finance Manager. Of the 109 participants from cohort 2 who completed the post-survey, 71 were from a central MAT team, and 35 were based within a school, 8 of which included LA Maintained Schools

#### v. Implementation and Process

### Summary of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 Post-Survey Results

Of the 109 participants who completed the post-survey in July 2023, between 77.1% and 84.4% rated each module of the training as excellent or very good. This was similar to the cohort 1 survey results, which found that more than between 83.3% and 100% of participants rated each module as excellent or very good.



79.8% percent of participants from Cohort 2 and 88.9% of participants from Cohort 1 who completed the survey were satisfied with the training overall. Feedback included:

- “I learnt a lot from the course and have been able to use this to develop a new process internally to manage procurement and then the contract after it is in place. Overall, a very useful course.” (Cohort 2 Participant)
- “It is a great course. I like the extra resources attached to the course, like the best practice guide, I always can refer it back. Also, I have started to apply the tips I learned in the course. I have had one discussion with a colleague. He was impressed that I can help him to negotiate service's KPIs which we never done it before.” (Cohort 1 Participant)

Some felt that aspects of the training should be modified to school contexts. For example, qualitative feedback from the survey emphasised that some of the exercises during the training were of scenarios that were difficult to apply in practice within a school or MAT. This was mainly when the exercises included contracts of a substantial cost and size, involving working within a large commercial team. Feedback included:

- “The course was great and will be made better with an emphasis on school specific contract needs. It was a good foundation level course.” (Cohort 2 Participant)
- “Really good. Wasn't as simple as I assumed it would be. Probably got caught out by some of the Government specific stuff i.e., when to involve commercial vs policy teams etc.” (Cohort 1 Participant)

In line with the qualitative feedback, 74.3% of cohort 2 and 94.4% of cohort 1 survey respondents felt that the training was pitched at the right level and relevant to their skills and experience.

Overall, it was felt that the foundation level training is fit for purpose but could benefit from some changes to make it more relevant for the MAT/school context. We have taken this on board and will be progressing these changes in future stages of the pilot.

## **vi. Impacts**

### **Knowledge and Understanding of Contract Management**

77.8% of cohort 1 and 96.3% of cohort 2 survey respondents felt that their knowledge and understanding of contract management had increased because of the training, and there is some evidence from follow-up interviews with participants from cohort 2 that they are beginning to put their knowledge to practice. Feedback included:

- “For one of our contracts which we have been having issues with, it has helped me know how to now start to address the issue from a legal context compared to before.” (School Finance and Business Manager)
- “I think in the specification side, there was a lot more that we could have done in terms of going out to our customers, which is obviously our schools to say ‘what do you need’ rather than us thinking this is what they need, and we’ll just go out and procure it anyway. So, there was a lot in the course about engaging with stakeholders and getting your business case right. And I think that’s really valuable at the start of the course to have those sort of building blocks in place before you even get to specifications.” (Trust Head of Estates)

### **Confidence Managing Contracts**

Likewise, 87.2% of survey respondents felt that the training increased their confidence in contract management. This finding was confirmed in the follow-up interviews with all 3 interviewees discussing how they feel more empowered and confident to deal with suppliers. Feedback included:

- “It’s allowed me to feel more confident in asking some of the more challenging questions to contractors knowing in many ways that they’re expecting it and they’ll have the answer. I’m feeling more empowered, I guess, to discuss the terms and conditions and sort of challenge them for more information, for clarity.” (MAT Director of Procurement, Projects and Sustainability)
- “I’m much more cognisant of the different things that we should be preparing for even before we get to the specification.” (Trust Head of Estates)
- “It’s just being aware of what your options are if you’re thinking about going down that route and the things that you can do before you get to that stage (of needing to terminate a contract). So that’s more the contract management where I’ve been able to implement what I’ve learned so far.” (Trust Head of Estates)

The School Finance and Business Manager felt empowered, but 4-weeks after the training had not yet re-tendered or renegotiated a contract to be able to put their learning to practice. Feedback included:

- “It’s given me more empowerment, I think, to know how to I can deal with the contractors rather than, you know, not being sure that what I’m saying is correct. So, it has helped me in that context, but I haven’t had to put it in practice yet.” (School Finance and Business Manager)

### **Potential Future Impacts – Value for Money and Economies of Scale**

Participants of the training are:



- Increasing their understanding of the legal implications and specifications of contracts.
- Feeling more empowered and experiencing increased confidence to deal with suppliers and negotiate contracts.

It is expected that as they begin to renegotiate existing contracts, or tender for new contracts, they will be able to achieve better value for money. Early indications of these impacts include interviewees from MATs explaining how they are planning to achieve economies of scale by consolidating individual school contracts to a single contract covering all or most of their schools. Feedback included:

- “We've got separate contracts in place at the moment. We are obviously expecting there to be some economies of scale resulting in a cost saving if we go with the trust wide contract.” (Trust Head of Estates)
- “I think there's been areas where we can say we've made savings and saved time... We've expanded on the agreement but got better value across what the schools were paying... I think we have we have made savings and efficiencies in what we're doing.” (MAT Director of Procurement)

Staff from 4 MATs from Cohort 1 who completed the impact survey reported saving a total of £160,000. MAT 1 reported saving £40,147 from contract negotiations, £30,295 from re-tendering contracts, and £14,611 from unlocking contract KPIs. MAT 2 reported saving £40,080 from contract negotiations and £19,839 from re-tendering contracts. MAT 3 reported saving £10,054 from contract negotiations, and MAT 4 reported saving £7,172 from contract negotiations.

## Annex D – Methodology of evidence collections

This report presents evidence from departmental and sector-led surveys about school and trust business professionals' needs and how effectively needs are being met. This includes:

- **SBP surveys 2019 and 2021:** Representative sample survey of financial leads in schools and academy trusts, reports, including methodology, available at: [Survey of school business professionals](#) and [Survey of school business professionals: 2021](#).
- **SBP survey 2023:** The same approach as in 2019 and 2021, due to be published on gov.uk shortly once full analysis and quality assurance is complete. This report produces key findings. A methodology for this survey is below.
- **SRMSAC:** Mandatory annual returns from every academy trust in England with an open school on 31 December the year in which they are making the return. The question used in section 3 is: A5: Has the board appointed a qualified and/or experienced chief financial officer (CFO)? We received 2,426 responses from 2,436 academy trusts, which is a response rate of 99.6%.
- **School workforce census:** The school workforce census is a statutory data collection that takes place each autumn. A further explanation is below.
- **SBP engagement survey:** A survey issued to attendees to roundtable events hosted by DfE's Schools Commercial Team between November 2022 and June 2023, responded to by 92 school and trust business professionals.

### SBP Survey 2023 methodology

A stratified sampling process aimed to achieve as close to a representative sample as possible for each of five groups – local authority (LA) primaries, LA secondaries, Single Academy Trust (SAT) primaries, SAT secondaries and MATs – to generate statistically robust findings. Special schools, nurseries and alternative provision were not included. Fieldwork took place between 15 June 2023 and 10 July 2023. Each school or academy trust had an individualised survey link specific for them. This meant one response per school or MAT and was linked by our contractor, IFF Research, to other Get Information About Schools variables on school (or academy trust) size, region etc to inform data analysis. Email invites to take part were sent directly to the financial lead at MATs and SATs by the DfE from a project mailbox. Invites to LA maintained schools were sent to the primary contact held by the DfE which tended to be a general school email address with a request they be forwarded to the financial lead at the school. Invites to academy trusts (SATs and MATs) were sent to the financial lead. Two email reminders encouraging completion were sent by DfE staff from the project mailbox at different points during late June and early July 2023. The survey received 1,168 responses: an overall response rate of 29%.

## School Workforce Census

Information on the school workforce, including a breakdown by broad post (such as teaching assistant or other school support staff) for state-funded schools in England is published annually in [School workforce in England](#). Each staff contract also records a more detailed role, including 'Bursar', 'Business Manager', 'Finance Officer', 'ICT Network Manager', 'Office Manager' and 'Premises Manager', and up to three distinct roles may be recorded per contract. A full list of possible staff roles collected in the School Workforce Census is published in the department's [Common Basic DataSet](#) (CBDS).

Please note that the figures in this report are based on the first staff role per contract as reported by the school. For the vast majority of staff identified, this was their main/only role reported. There may be other staff in schools who fulfil these roles but have not been recorded as such; they may have a contract of 28 days or less, schools may record up to three roles per member of staff and the school may have allocated them mainly to other roles. A school may also bring in services from outside agencies, or the local authority, to meet their needs.



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3).

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

About this publication:

enquiries [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](https://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

download [www.gov.uk/government/publications](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications)



Follow us on Twitter:  
[@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)



Like us on Facebook:  
[facebook.com/educationgovuk](https://facebook.com/educationgovuk)