



Education & Skills
Funding Agency

Education and Skills Funding Agency
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[Customer help portal](#)

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To accounting officers in academy trusts

Dear colleagues

Academy trust handbook 2024

When I wrote to you on 29 May 2024, following the announcement of the election, I explained how the majority of the agency's activities would continue as normal, whilst some would pause including publishing the updated academy trust handbook.

I am pleased, therefore, that we have published the handbook today.

Following last year's simpler and shorter edition, we have deliberately limited the number of changes in this year's edition following feedback that a period of greater stability would be welcomed. However, there are a small number of changes to draw to your attention; an important new simplification, and a small number of further changes to improve and strengthen control and oversight.

- **Finance leasing** – Whilst you have always been able to enter into operating leases, from 1 September 2024 you will also be able to take out finance leases, without approaching us for prior approval, where the asset type you are leasing appears on the Department for Education's (DfE's) [approved list](#). It is important for you to have appropriate flexibility to manage spending decisions locally, and this new freedom should help you manage your assets effectively.
- **Internal scrutiny** – Assessing whether your systems and controls are suitable and operating effectively provides your board with vital assurance. I know that trusts are continuing to develop their approach in this area, and this should be proportionate depending on the size and complexity of the trust. For those trusts with revenue income greater than £50 million per year, the new handbook explains that you should have a professional internal audit function, and from 1 September 2025 this will be a requirement for such trusts.
- **Electric Vehicle Salary Sacrifice (EVSS) Schemes** – Following ongoing cross-government discussions, we need to pause the position on EVSS schemes included in the 2023 to 2024 handbook while we

clarify our approach and gather data on how trusts are planning to implement them. Therefore, from 1 September 2024, you will need to contact ESFA using the [customer help portal](#) in the early stages of planning to offer a new scheme or before accepting any further employees onto an existing scheme to discuss the position. We will keep you updated if our discussions lead to a further update to this section of the handbook.

- **Estates management** – Estates management, practice and capability as well as effective and efficient use of funding, is critical in helping to ensure your buildings are safe, well-maintained, and operational. DfE's focus is about promoting constructive, supportive and ongoing dialogue with you, whilst recognising instances where there may be a need for additional action by a minority of trusts. We are therefore extending the list of circumstances in which a notice to improve may be issued to include estates management.
- **Digital and technology standards** – We are adding a reference to DfE's [digital and technology standards](#) and explaining that trusts should take appropriate action to meet them.

Our aim remains to ensure that this handbook is a source of certainty and clarity for the sector. We remain keen to work with you to ensure that our approach to financial oversight feels proportionate. So, if you have questions or feedback, you can contact the agency using the [customer help portal](#).

Please do share this letter with your board of trustees, chief financial officer, and executives, and arrange for it to be discussed at your next board meeting.

With best wishes for your students' success in their examination results later in the summer.

Yours sincerely



David Withey
Chief Executive
Education and Skills Funding Agency