



Department
for Education

Condition Improvement Fund 2026-27

Information for applicants

October 2025

Contents

Summary	6
Who this publication is for	6
New information for CIF 2026-27	6
Information for accounting officers / senior management team	7
Accounting officer / senior management team checklist	8
Introduction	9
About the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF)	9
Key dates for CIF 2026-27	10
Urgent Capital Support	10
Eligibility and general information	11
Who can apply for CIF?	11
Schools with academy orders	12
Voluntary aided (VA) schools	12
Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) schools	12
School Rebuilding Programme (SRP)	13
Free schools	14
Projects	14
Condition projects	15
Condition with expansion projects	15
Expansion projects	15
Project thresholds for CIF 2026-27	17
Primary and special schools	17
Secondary schools, all-through schools and sixth-form colleges	17
Applying for two projects	18
Use of technical advisers	18
Procurement of technical advice	18
Conflicts of Interest	19
Submission of evidence	20
Professional fees	20
CIF loans	21

VAT	22
Projects placed on hold pending further due diligence	22
Appeals	23
Evidence to include with a CIF application	24
Documents to upload with your application	24
Concerns with an application	25
Evidence of project need for condition projects	25
Condition survey	25
Condition Data Collection (CDC)	26
Other evidence of condition	27
Good Estate Management for Schools	28
Block replacement / refurbishment	28
Changes to the Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA)	29
Sustainability considerations	29
Boiler and heating systems	29
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS)	30
Safeguarding	31
Access and specialist facilities for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)	31
Emergency asbestos issues	31
Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC)	32
Evidence of project need for expansion projects	32
Basic Need	33
Overcrowding	33
Significant change – Academies	33
Eligible VA schools	34
Post-16 expansion	34
Growth data	34
Demand data	35
Net capacity	35
Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) programme	35
Supporting evidence for all project types	36
Project Cost	36

Project Planning	37
Feasibility study – all project types	38
How to apply	40
CIF portal	40
CIF portal account access	40
How we assess your application	42
Assessment considerations	42
Assessment criteria	42
Assessment of project need for condition projects	44
Project type – project priority and specification	44
Urgency of need	46
Strength of evidence for extent of need	46
Nature and extent of impact	47
Evidence of GEMS process and strategy	47
Assessment of project need for expansion projects	48
Popularity / demand	48
Performance	48
Capacity constraints	49
Deprivation	49
Project cost – all project types	50
Overall costs	51
Cost certainty	51
Funding sources	52
Environmental sustainability	52
Project planning – all project types	54
Appropriateness of solution	54
Timescales	55
Delivery plan	55
Annex A – Condition Improvement Funding Declaration	56
Annex B – CIF loans	57
Affordability tests	58
Affordability tests for academies	58
Affordability tests for sixth-form colleges	58

Affordability tests for Voluntary Aided (VA) schools	59
Repayments	59
Annex C – Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA)	60
Where the cover provided by the RPA is not sufficient	60
Existing structures	61
Contract works	61
Annex D – School Resource Management Advisers (SRMA)	63

Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to help eligible academies, sixth-form colleges and voluntary aided (VA) schools that wish to apply to the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) for the 2026-27 financial year (April 2026 to March 2027).

It explains what CIF is, who is eligible to apply for CIF funding, what types of projects are eligible and how bids for funding will be assessed for the 2026-27 round.

If you wish to apply for funding, you should familiarise yourself with this guidance.

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for:

- School leaders, school staff and governing bodies in CIF eligible academies, sixth-form colleges and voluntary aided (VA) schools.

New information for CIF 2026-27

School Rebuilding Programme (SRP)

Clarification that only in exceptional circumstances, to address legal compliance health and safety issues, a Responsible Body selected for SRP may submit a CIF application. ([See page 13](#)).

Technical Adviser use and procurement

Applications for 2026-27 must clearly set out and evidence the process undertaken in procuring and appointing any technical advice. If you decide not to employ a technical adviser, you must ensure that the person responsible for the project has relevant experience and/or qualifications. ([See page 18](#)).

Assessment Considerations

We have set out that ultimately, your CIF application will either be fully funded or unsuccessful. In certain circumstances we may place your application on hold whilst we undertake additional due diligence and/or attach conditions of funding. Should we identify a significant breach of this guidance or any other regulatory or statutory guidance, your application may be disqualified and deemed unsuccessful. ([See page 42](#)).

Project Costs - inclusion of contingencies and provisional sums

We have clarified that project contingency is for unforeseen work, whilst provisional sums should only be expended on work of the scope and nature set out in the description of the included sum. Project contingency and provisional sums must not fund increased scope without an approved Scope Change Request. ([See page 50](#)).

Information for accounting officers / senior management team

The accounting officer, or in the case of a sixth-form college or VA school, a member of the senior management team is solely responsible for the CIF application.

You are responsible for the accuracy and relevance of the information in your application, as well as the submission of the application on the portal, not your consultant or technical adviser. This includes ensuring that the information provided in the application form matches that in the supporting documentation. Please note that successful applications are funded based on the information contained in the cost section of the portal application form, and not the uploaded document(s). You must ensure that your application includes bespoke, third-party evidence that is unique to your school. If an error is made in the information provided in your application form, including the supporting evidence, then this could disqualify your application, reduce your final score, or affect the amount of funding awarded, should you be successful.

The accounting officer, or in the case of a sixth-form college or VA school, a member of the senior management team, should note the following:

- Your CIF application will either be fully funded or unsuccessful. To aid assessment, some applications may be put on hold whilst further due diligence is undertaken. Any applications that are disqualified will be categorised as 'unsuccessful'. We will not fund part of the proposed works within an application, unless we require the project to be rescope. In the event of this happening, your application would be placed on hold.
- The project must address condition issues on buildings owned or leased by the responsible body or held by charitable site trustees for the school's purposes.
- You must not commence work on any CIF project prior to approval to proceed being given. The department will not fund projects which have already commenced before the announcement is made and funding may be withheld or recovered in these circumstances.
- You must familiarise yourself with the terms and conditions and post-approval guidance before submitting your application for CIF funding. You can find these on the [CIF portal](#).
- If your application is successful, you will be responsible for the management of the project as well as meeting the requirements of the post approval guidance and the grant funding terms and conditions. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions will affect payment of the grant.
- Activity that breaches the terms and conditions, such as using CIF funding for any work other than what has been specifically approved, may result in you having to repay some, or all, of the funding. The accounting officer, or in the case of a sixth-form college or VA school, a member of the senior management team, is responsible for this, not your consultant or contractor.

Accounting officer / senior management team checklist

This list is not exhaustive but provides some important things you must consider and action as part of your CIF application.

Action	Complete
The application has been completed in accordance with the information for applicants' guidance.	
The application is being submitted against the correct school.	
Evidence of project need has been uploaded, and it is for the correct school/project.	
All surveys included with the application have been carried out by an independent source and clearly show the name and qualification of the surveyor, as well as the date.	
Evidence of project cost has been uploaded, and it is for the correct school/project.	
Evidence of project planning has been uploaded, and it is for the correct school/project.	
All evidence uploaded, including photographs, is clear and easy to read/view.	
If you are a VA school, you have included the mandatory 10% contribution in your application form and supporting documents (this contribution cannot be covered by a CIF loan).	
The Condition Improvement Fund declaration has been hand-signed and uploaded.	
The application has been fully reviewed by the accounting officer / senior management team, including the portal application form and supporting documents.	
The application has been submitted by the accounting officer / senior management team, not the technical adviser.	

Introduction

About the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF)

CIF's core priority is to support condition projects, and the focus of the fund is to keep school and college buildings safe and in good working order. Most CIF funding aims to address building issues with significant consequences that revenue or other funding cannot meet. These include issues with poor building condition, building compliance or health and safety.

We give the highest priority to condition projects that address compliance and health and safety issues. These include building safety matters, fire protection systems, gas safety, electrical safety or emergency asbestos removal. We also give priority to critical replacements of coal and oil-fired boilers with low carbon heating alternatives where there is a risk of school closure. We then give priority to projects that ensure weather tightness of buildings and other projects for continuous heating and water supply.

CIF also supports a small proportion of expansion projects where Ofsted has rated the school or sixth-form college either good or outstanding in quality of education and leadership & management subcategories, and where the school needs to expand their existing facilities and/or floor space to either increase admissions or address overcrowding. Where a rating in one or both sub-categories is not available, we will instead use the single word rating, which should be good or outstanding. For schools that have been inspected under Ofsted's renewed education framework, which came into effect on 10 November, we will review bids on a case-by-case basis.

All CIF projects, both condition and expansion, must aim to improve a capital asset currently used for educational provision for pupils between the ages of 2 and 19 years. These will be assets held freehold by the school or college concerned, held by the school on a long lease (minimum 25 years) – usually from the relevant local authority, or held by charitable site trustees for the school's purposes. You cannot use CIF funds to purchase land.

Please remember not everyone will be successful even if you provide a high-quality bid. On average only around a third of applications are successful each year.

Key dates for CIF 2026-27

Milestone	Date
Launch of CIF 2026-27: information for applicants published and online application window opens	21 October 2025
Deadline for new applicants to register for a CIF portal account	12 noon, 9 December 2025
Deadlines for applicants to submit applications with all supporting documents	12 noon, 16 December 2025
Applicants notified of outcome	May 2026 (subject to change)
Appeal window opens	June 2026 (subject to change)
Appeal outcomes published	July 2026 (subject to change)

Table 1: key dates for CIF 2026-27

Urgent Capital Support

Schools that are eligible for CIF in a given financial year can apply for Urgent Capital Support (UCS) at any time of the year where there are urgent condition issues that threaten the closure of the whole school, or a significant part of it. Please see the Urgent Capital Support section at [Condition Improvement Fund - GOV.UK](#) for the latest information on the fund.

Please note that where UCS applications are received between October 2025 and April 2026, if they are duplicates of any CIF 2026-27 application, then the CIF application may be withdrawn if the UCS application is successful.

Eligibility and general information

Who can apply for CIF?

In any given financial year, an eligible school will either attract direct School Condition Allocations (SCA) for its responsible body, or be eligible for CIF, but not both. SCA is a formulaic allocation paid directly to responsible bodies to invest in their schools according to their own assessment of condition need. Further detail about SCA is available in the [School capital funding](#) guidance.

To be eligible to apply for CIF funding, you must have been one of the following at the start of September 2025:

- Stand-alone academy.
- School in a multi-academy trust (MAT) with fewer than five schools or fewer than 3,000 pupils as counted in the Spring 2025 census or 2024/25 Individualised Learner Record (ILR) (details of how pupils are counted for eligibility purposes are provided below).
- Voluntary Aided (VA) school in a VA body or VA group with fewer than five schools or fewer than 3,000 pupils as counted in the Spring 2025 census or 2024/25 ILR.
- Sixth-form college.
- School with a signed academy order as of 1 September 2025 that the department expects will convert to a CIF-eligible responsible body by 1 April 2026.

MATs and VA bodies or groups with five or more schools at the start of September 2025 and at least 3,000 pupils in those schools or their predecessors (as counted in the Spring 2025 census, or 2024/25 ILR) will be eligible for SCA in 2026-27. Local authorities with maintained schools will also be eligible for SCA in 2026-27. Eligible non-maintained special schools and special post-16 institutions will receive a direct allocation in respect of their state funded pupils. See the [School capital funding](#) guidance for further details.

For special and alternative-provision schools (including pupil referral units), we multiply the pupil count by 4.5 for the purposes of determining either CIF or SCA eligibility. For example, we would count a MAT with 1,000 pupils in special schools as having 4,500 pupils. If pupils are registered at more than one institution, we divide the count by the number of institutions that the pupil is registered at. For example, pupils dual registered at a mainstream school and pupil referral unit would have their count divided by two at both institutions. For nursery schools and sixth-form colleges, we use the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) pupils rather than headcount. For nursery schools, this is calculated as part-time equivalent (PTE) $\times$ 0.6.

If a school is invited to bid for CIF for the 2026-27 financial year, their responsible body will not receive any SCA funding on their behalf. The school should therefore apply for

funding from CIF if they have condition investment requirements. We encourage schools to speak to their responsible body to make sure that they are aware that the school has been invited to bid for CIF.

If you are unable to register and/or create an account, but think you are eligible to apply for CIF, please contact us as soon as possible via the [Customer Help Portal](#).

Schools with academy orders

Schools with an academy order at the start of September 2025 that are expected to convert into a CIF eligible trust by 1 April 2026 have been invited to apply.

If you are a school with a signed academy order that has been invited to bid into CIF and are unable to log onto the CIF portal, please contact the CIF team as soon as possible via the [Customer Help Portal](#). Once we have determined your eligibility, we can give you access to the CIF portal so that you can make an application.

If a school eligible for CIF in 2026-27 transfers to a SCA eligible responsible body, or if a planned transfer to a CIF eligible trust is significantly delayed or cancelled, we will not normally change its eligibility for that year. This is to avoid schools wasting time on CIF bids that are not then considered. We will fund successful bids, even if the school does not transfer to a CIF eligible trust. Funding will be paid to the relevant responsible body.

Voluntary aided (VA) schools

VA schools (including VA schools with a sixth form) who meet the CIF eligibility requirements will be invited to apply for CIF 2026-27. The governing bodies of VA schools will continue to pay at least 10% of the costs of any successful CIF project and cannot use a CIF loan to cover this. Applications must be submitted with the full amount of funding included to show value for money. VA schools can include VAT in the project cost (unlike academies), as they cannot reclaim it.

VA schools (including VA schools with a sixth form) must include the 10% contribution towards the project cost within the application form and supporting documents. Failure to do so will result in the application being disqualified.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) schools

PFI and PSBP schools that meet the eligibility criteria set out in the who can apply for CIF section above can apply for CIF funding where a need can be demonstrated and provided the condition issue it not already covered by warranties, insurance or contractual agreements.

If you are an applicant with a PFI school, you must declare this in your CIF application and provide a strong rationale to explain why the work is not covered by the PFI contract.

If you are an applicant with a PSBP project, you must contact your PSBP Project Director before you apply to make sure that you do not duplicate works covered by this project in your CIF application. If an urgent issue arises, you should also let your Project Director know as this might affect the PSBP works.

School Rebuilding Programme (SRP)

SRP delivers major rebuilding and refurbishment projects at schools and sixth-form colleges across England, with priorities determined by building condition. If your school has been selected for SRP, we would not normally expect you to apply for CIF funding. However, you may apply for CIF where there are specific buildings or areas of the site that fall outside the eventual scope of the SRP project. Please note that until the SRP feasibility stage is complete, the scope of works remains unconfirmed. All buildings on the school site are considered during feasibility and may be brought into scope, even if they were not included in the original SRP nomination.

SRP will not deliver condition works ahead of the main contractor starting on site. Therefore, where urgent condition issues arise that cannot safely be deferred, a Responsible Body may submit a CIF application. These cases will be considered strictly on a case-by-case basis and must demonstrate that the works are essential for the school to remain operational and represent good value for money.

Responsible Bodies should not assume CIF funding will be made available simply because works are urgent; applications will continue to be assessed independently and with heightened scrutiny, given the risk that works could subsequently be lost to SRP delivery and the shorter lifespan these works may have compared to standard CIF projects.

In all cases, we would only expect to see a CIF application where the project relates to Legal Compliance and Health and Safety issues that present a high risk of school closure. Applications will only be considered where the CIF assessor determines that the project meets this category.

We may also consider projects that fall under the category of life-expired condition with a high risk of school closure. These must demonstrate an immediate and urgent need to address the condition issue, with clear evidence that it is having a significant impact on the school or leading to the closure of key facilities. Such projects will be subject to an internal review, taking account of whether an SRP feasibility study has been undertaken, whether the SRP project scope has been defined, and the anticipated timescale for on-site delivery.

In these cases, the responsible body may be required to provide additional evidence of the condition need, and to work closely with their Technical Adviser to identify the most appropriate and cost-effective solution. Where a temporary measure represents better value for money than a permanent solution, it may be considered acceptable, provided it ensures the building remains safe and operational until SRP delivery. Temporary works must align with the objectives of the approved project scope and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The responsible body will also be expected to play an active role in facilitating discussions with DfE, to ensure there is a shared and robust understanding of the proposed way forward.

As with other categories, these applications will only be considered where the CIF assessor determines that the project falls into this category. We reserve the right to disqualify CIF applications from SRP schools where the proposed project:

- Falls within the scope of the SRP project – including cases where the SRP scope is confirmed after the CIF application has been submitted.
- Does not demonstrate an immediate and urgent need for the condition issue to be addressed.
- Does not demonstrate that the condition issue is having a significant impact on the school or leading to the closure of key facilities.

We also reserve the right to reduce the scope of successful CIF projects where necessary to ensure value for money in light of SRP investment.

While our intention is to avoid withholding funding for any successful CIF project, this may occur if the project requires re-scoping or further consideration. Where the Department has agreed a strategy with the responsible body and approved the project, but the responsible body is subsequently unable to deliver the agreed scope, the Department reserves the right to withdraw the project.

Free schools

If your CIF project is for a school that was part of the free schools programme, you must first confirm that the CIF project was not in scope of the free school project and, by reviewing contracts and the relevant warranties, confirm that there are no recall opportunities from the original contractor, subcontractor or on products or materials used.

If the review of contracts or warranties produces a recall opportunity from the contractor, there will be no need to apply for CIF.

Projects

There are three categories of CIF project: condition, condition with expansion and expansion. Projects may be re-categorised by the department if they do not meet the qualification criteria for the selected criteria.

There is more information about how applications are assessed in the [Assessment of project need for condition projects](#) and the [Assessment of project need for expansion projects](#) sections of the guidance. Condition with expansion projects are scored using the same criteria as condition projects.

Condition projects

These are projects to improve the condition of buildings, with no expansion of the gross internal floor area (GIFA).

We expect the majority of projects supported through CIF to involve the replacement of high priority components such as structural elements, boilers and electrics, fire doors and alarms, roof coverings and windows, and asbestos removal.

Applicants must seek professional advice on the condition of their buildings through an independent survey. You should provide a realistic options appraisal which provides genuine options for consideration. This should also set out a clear scope and demonstrate value for money.

Condition with expansion projects

These are projects to improve the condition where the GIFA of the new block is up to 10% larger than the previous block. The aim of the project must primarily be to address significant condition need.

We will accept projects in this category where the GIFA of the new block is up to 10% larger than the existing GIFA that is being replaced, if you provide clear evidence that there is no other alternative to meeting area standards as defined by [Building Bulletin 103 or 104](#).

You must design to the area standards as defined by [Building Bulletin 103 or 104](#) to determine what increase in GIFA, if any, is required and apply accordingly.

If a condition with expansion project does not meet these criteria, it will be disqualified. The evidence for the project need section of a condition with expansion project must focus on, and demonstrate, the condition need. Projects that add new functional areas or facilities to address overcrowding or wish to increase their planned admittance number (PAN), must be submitted as expansion applications.

Expansion projects

The purpose of expansion projects is to create additional places or address existing overcrowding in schools, where the existing number of pupils on roll is greater than capacity. Applicants looking to expand must demonstrate that they are high performing,

as per the criteria in the assessment of project need for expansion projects section, and the GIFA of the new block must be more than 10% larger than the previous block or add functional areas or facilities. You should submit evidence that there is no alternative to meeting area standards across the whole site, as defined by [Building Bulletin 103 or 104](#). If an expansion project involves the provision of a new building, please ensure you are meeting the requirements in [Building Bulletin 103 or 104](#).

Only a very small proportion of CIF will be allocated to address expansion issues across high performing applicants and will be restricted to academies with fewer than 2,000 pupils. All CIF expansion projects should refer to the DfE's Construction Design Standards.

Fully and partially selective schools that select based on general academic ability will be able to apply to CIF for an expansion project.

All successful expansion projects will be placed on hold whilst further due diligence is carried out. Release of CIF funding will be subject to further DfE review of proposals, where we may require applicants to submit further information e.g., tender returns, planning evidence, updated project programmes or detailed cost plans, for scrutiny prior to final approval. This is to ensure that overall costs and delivery timelines are realistic and robust.

Added places projects

Expansion projects that lead to an increase in the number of pupils on roll will be defined as added places.

Overcrowding projects

Expansion projects that address overcrowding in schools where the existing number of pupils on roll is greater than capacity, but do not result in an increase to the number of pupils on roll, will be defined as overcrowding projects.

We recognise that in some cases, value for money can be achieved by adding places in projects that are primarily to address overcrowding. We will define and assess these projects as overcrowding if you provide clear evidence that overcrowding is the primary focus of the expansion, and adding places offers good value for money.

Where the type of expansion is re-categorised, and the supplementary data is not available, the application may be penalised and is unlikely to be successful.

For more information about expansion projects, please refer to the assessment of project need for expansion projects section of the guidance.

Your expansion application will be disqualified if your capacity will increase by less than 10% for an added places project or your existing number on roll is less than 10% over your capacity for an overcrowding project.

Project thresholds for CIF 2026-27

All CIF projects, both condition and expansion, must aim to improve a capital asset currently used for educational provision for pupils between the ages of 2 and 19 years. These will be assets held on freehold by the school or college concerned, held by the school on a long lease (minimum 25 years) – usually from the relevant local authority, or held by charitable site trustees for the school's purposes. The applicant must be responsible for capital investment in the buildings. You cannot use CIF funds to purchase land.

Responsible bodies wishing to apply for CIF should ensure that they have fully engaged the freehold landowner and have their consent for any works before applying. This will be particularly relevant where land is held by charitable site trustees. For church schools on trustee-held land, this engagement should be with the relevant diocese, and Church of England Schools are also required to seek consent from the Diocesan Board of Education.

The planning and preparation, as well as the construction programme must be realistic and achievable. The majority of funds will be allocated for projects that complete by 31 March 2027. Larger projects may last up to 2 years, but all projects must complete by 31 March 2028.

Information and communication technology (ICT) software, loose furniture and equipment are ineligible. ICT hardware will not be eligible unless there is clear evidence that it is an integral part of the project. ICT infrastructure (cabling, wireless and switching) is only eligible when it is an integral part of larger project.

Primary and special schools

The minimum project funding threshold for primary and special schools is £20,000. The maximum project funding threshold is £4,000,000.

Secondary schools, all-through schools and sixth-form colleges

The minimum project funding for secondary schools, all-through schools and sixth-form colleges is £50,000. The maximum project threshold is £4,000,000.

Applying for two projects

You may submit up to two projects per academy, sixth-form college or VA school on the CIF portal, but only one of these may be an expansion project. You cannot apply for two expansion projects.

You should avoid submitting multiple bids for works that would ordinarily be considered a single, cohesive project. For example, two bids for similar types of work within the same block. While these may appear distinct, there is often potential for overlap in scope and cost, and possible efficiencies if delivered under a single contract. Splitting such works into separate applications may lead to duplication, reduced value for money, and missed opportunities for streamlined delivery.

Each application will be assessed independently, and there is no guarantee that both will be successful, even if they are closely related. Where works are interdependent or could be more effectively delivered together, trusts should consider submitting a combined application. If separate bids are submitted where works are similar or interdependent, applicants must clearly explain the rationale for doing so and outline any links between the projects, including potential cost implications and delivery risks.

Use of technical advisers

You can use a technical adviser or representative to help prepare your application. If you are successful, we do cover the costs of appointing a technical adviser to help prepare your application and for oversight and management of CIF projects. However, it is not a mandatory requirement. Please note that technical advisers cannot apply on your behalf and even where you use a technical adviser, you remain responsible for the application. Please see the section below on procurement of technical advice.

If you decide not to employ a technical adviser, you must ensure that the person responsible for the project within your organisation is: suitably qualified; understands their statutory duties, together with the Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015 Act (CDM 2015) and their responsibilities as client / principal designer; is able to provide a comprehensive health and safety file at the end of the project; and ensures adequate indemnity insurance is in place. You cannot claim your own staff costs for managing a project. You cannot use technical adviser fees, identified within the bid, to undertake additional works if you then manage the project in-house.

We are required to deal with a responsible official at the institution with whom the Secretary of State has signed a funding agreement, or in the case of a sixth-form college or VA school, a member of the senior management team.

Procurement of technical advice

Like every part of your CIF project, any technical advice must be procured in line with your organisation's procurement policy, the regulations set out in the [Academy Trust Handbook](#) and any other applicable statutory and regulatory guidance such as the [College Financial Handbook](#). This includes undertaking reviews to ensure compliance

with applicable statutory and regulatory guidance in the case of firms that are procured based on a 'no-win-no-fee contract'.

Applications must clearly set out and evidence the process undertaken in appointing any technical advice. The procurement of technical advice must be inclusive of all stages of your application. Technical advice will be provided during the application stage through to the delivery of the project, so it is important that the application stage is accounted for in all procurement exercises.

As with all procurement, we strongly recommend that you research the company beforehand and consider selecting a firm that understands your technical needs and is most suited to meeting those needs. We would also recommend that you select an adviser who is registered with an appropriate professional body, such as the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the Chartered Institute of Builders (CIOB) or the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

You can obtain help and advice from procurement specialists via the department's [Buying for schools](#) service.

If you choose to appoint a technical adviser using an approved framework, the appointment must be compliant with the award process of the framework used. It is your responsibility to carry out sufficient checks of the framework agreement to identify whether you're allowed to select the supplier yourself via a direct award, without running a mini competition. If the framework agreement does not allow this, you must run a mini competition.

Failure to adequately evidence a compliant procurement process for appointing technical advice or adhere to the expectations set out above may result in the disqualification of your application.

Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest could lead to your application being disqualified, your final score being reduced, or your application being placed on hold whilst further due diligence is carried out.

Procurement regulations aim to ensure that there is open and fair competition when contracts are being awarded by public bodies. This means that you should consider, as part of your procurement activity, whether anyone involved in that activity may have any personal interest which might influence their decision making or their role in the procurement. You should consider any conflicts of interest that the technical adviser may have with others involved in your application, such as those undertaking the condition reports or tendering for the works.

You are responsible for carrying out due diligence for all contractors, not just the winning contractor. This must include ensuring all parties are qualified personnel and a transparent and competitive procurement process has been followed.

Your procurement process must ensure that all tenderers declare any personal or financial interest in any matter concerning any funded activities. You must declare any potential or perceived conflicts of interest in the application form, so that they can be considered as part of the assessment. Should a conflict of interest be identified to exist between the technical adviser and others involved in your application, this may result in the application being disqualified.

Surveys must also be from an independent source. The survey source will not be considered independent if, for example, it is conducted by a firm that has also quoted or tendered for the work or is a manufacturer of any proposed solution. This may result in the application being disqualified.

We will carry out checks as part of the assessment process. Conflicts of interest are not restricted to, nor limited to the examples given above.

Submission of evidence

You must make sure that the evidence and information you submit applies to your school or sixth-form college. The accounting officer, or in the case of a sixth-form college or VA school, a member of the senior management team, is solely responsible for the CIF application, including any uploaded evidence. If an error is made in the information provided in your application or the evidence, then this could disqualify your application, reduce your final score or affect the amount of funding awarded, should you be successful. You should check all of the information in the application form and uploaded documents, including where you have worked with a technical adviser, and be satisfied that it is correct before submitting your application.

CIF applications are scored based on bespoke third-party evidence that is unique to the school. Duplicated risk registers, surveys and other such information will not assist schools in competing for funding with other applicants and could, in some circumstances, lead to an application being disqualified. Please refer to the [Evidence to include with a CIF application](#) section of the guidance for more information on evidence.

Professional fees

If you choose to appoint a technical adviser to help you develop and/or deliver the project, you should ensure that as part of your procurement process to appoint them that the fees you will be charged are appropriate to the type and scale of the project and represent good value for money.

Fees must be proportionate to the type of project being delivered. The majority of CIF projects are for relatively straightforward, single issue, lower value works. Percentage fees are not necessarily appropriate for this type of work and if used, they should be a maximum of 10% of the total project value. This includes all professional fees and disbursements, as well as one off 'bid writer' fees, not just the technical adviser fee. The technical complexity of some works may justify slightly higher fees (but not necessarily above 10%), to cover items such as the need for additional surveys to mitigate risks, the use of specialist advisers such as a heritage architect, or intrusive ground investigations. However, the higher fee level must be specifically justified within the application.

Please be aware that 10% is not a default fee allowed for the CIF programme. It is considered a maximum amount unless there are very exceptional circumstances. When you are procuring a technical adviser, you must ensure that you are satisfied that the fees charged represent good value for money for your particular project, and should not assume that fees below 10%, or any 'no-win-no-fee' arrangements automatically offer good value for money. A competitive tendering process to appoint your technical adviser will help demonstrate that you are minimising fee costs. As with all procurement activity, you must be able to demonstrate that any technical advice has been procured in line with your school's procurement policy, and the regulations set out in the [Academy Trust Handbook](#) and [College Financial Handbook](#). You may be asked to provide evidence of the procurement undertaken.

You can obtain help and advice from procurement specialists via the department's [Buying for schools](#) service.

You should be aware that if your project is placed on hold following approval by the department, you cannot accept the terms and conditions on the CIF portal, and the department is under no obligation to make any payments in those circumstances in relation to your project. Any expenses you, or a third party, have incurred prior to full approval and/or the acceptance of the terms and conditions will not be funded by the department.

If the fees are disproportionate to the work involved, your application is likely to be unsuccessful.

CIF loans

You can apply for a CIF loan at Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) interest rates for all or part of the project funding for any CIF project to demonstrate commitment to the proposed scheme. You can choose the size of loan, and timescale over which you want to repay it (between 2 and 10 years). Additional points are available in the assessment for taking out a loan or making a financial contribution, however, it is the overall score that is the deciding factor as to whether a bid is successful and not the level of

contribution. Please note that applying for all your project funding as a CIF loan will not guarantee funding, you must still meet the CIF funding threshold.

Applications for CIF loans are made within the CIF application form and are subject to affordability tests. Applicants failing to pass the affordability tests will not be eligible to receive a loan but will instead be considered for grant funding if the application meets the threshold.

Further information, including interest rates and the affordability tests, is in [Annex B – CIF loans](#).

There is no obligation to take out a loan as part of the overall funding package. Applicants should consider carefully what is most appropriate for their school or college. Any loan should be realistic and affordable for the applicant and the information provided will be checked.

VAT

We expect academies to exclude VAT from all project costs in their CIF application. However, the trust may seek advice on whether VAT is payable on their project (for example, where community use of a sports facility creates liability), then they must include the VAT on the application form.

Sixth-form college and VA schools must include VAT in the project cost, regardless of project type, as they cannot usually reclaim it. However, if there is a VAT element which can be reclaimed, then it should not be included with the project cost.

Projects placed on hold pending further due diligence

Projects may be placed on hold pending further due diligence. Release of CIF funding will be subject to further departmental review, and we may require applicants to submit further information, e.g., tender returns, planning evidence, updated project programmes. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Projects with a total project value of £1m or more.
- Expansion projects.
- Block replacement projects.
- Projects with possible duplicate funding, for example, SRP and PFI.
- Projects where there are concerns with the procurement, including, procurement of the technical advice.
- Projects where there are concerns with the tendering exercise.

We will write to you separately if your project is placed on hold with further details.

You should be aware that if your project is placed on hold whilst further due diligence is undertaken, you cannot accept the terms and conditions. You should not start your project until final approval is given. The department is under no obligation to make any payments in those circumstances in relation to your project. Any expenses you, or a third party, have incurred prior to full approval and/or the acceptance of the terms and conditions will not be funded by the department.

Appeals

We will be opening an appeal window in June 2026 (subject to change). CIF 2026-27 will only consider appeals from applicants who can show that we have made a material error in the assessment, or disqualification, of their application and this has resulted in the application being unsuccessful.

All appeals must be submitted via the CIF portal. We will not accept appeals submitted via any other method.

Detailed guidance on the 2026-27 appeals process will be published in due course.

Evidence to include with a CIF application

Documents to upload with your application

For each project you apply for, you should upload one document for each section to support your application. You can also include one additional document which includes photographs. Each document can be up to a maximum of 1MB and must not contain links to further documents.

For both condition and expansion projects, you will need to include detailed photographs within a document size limit of 1MB. However, you can now upload your photographs in a separate 1MB document. Files will need to be compressed. The file size depends on its pixel dimensions. You may want to notify anyone taking photographs to reduce the dimensions of the image prior to taking the photos. This does not mean reducing the resolution.

As a minimum, all project types must upload:

- 1 upload document for project need
- 1 upload document for project planning
- 1 upload document for project cost
- Hand-signed Condition Improvement Fund declaration

All project types can also upload:

- 1 additional upload document for photographs

You should use the following naming convention when uploading your documents: URN_SchoolName_Need/Planning/Cost/Declaration/Photographs. Please ensure that you use your current URN, and not a previous or future URN.

You should limit the upload to evidence of the relevant criteria i.e. you should not include project need evidence in the project planning upload.

Please do not exceed the upload limits shown above, as we will not consider any evidence above the upload limit.

The evidence you submit should be proportionate to the scale of the project. For example, we would expect more detailed information for a project requesting significantly more funding than a project which requests an amount nearer the minimum project threshold.

You should not include the school or college's history or the full history of the condition issue; this is not required and may reduce the amount of more relevant information you can include.

If the project documents uploaded to your application do not correspond with the school/college on the portal form and/or the correct project, the application may be disqualified. Please ensure all correct documents have been uploaded by midday 16 December 2025.

Concerns with an application

The department may contact you by email should it identify any issues or concerns with your application. Please be aware that this email will be sent to the email address of the CIF portal account holder. Therefore, you should ensure that the details are correct. The response must come from you and not your technical adviser.

Evidence of project need for condition projects

We expect applicants to provide appropriate building condition survey data to evidence the project need. An up-to-date independent condition survey will assist you in identifying and prioritising the worst condition areas of your site. Most projects will need to provide additional survey data or appropriate professional evidence so there is more detailed evidence of condition need.

Your project need upload should include a brief narrative that clearly sets out the need for the project and the exact works that are being proposed. It should be clear to someone who cannot see the building what works are being proposed. Please note that extensive narrative which includes generic and/or unevidenced statements is not acceptable evidence.

Condition survey

A condition survey provides an assessment of the physical condition of the building. The survey should identify the building's deficiencies and maintenance issues. For all projects, the condition survey should provide a clear understanding of the current condition of the building both internally and externally. This should also include a detailed assessment of the consequences of any delay or failure to undertake the proposed work.

Surveys must be from an independent source. They will not be considered independent if, for example, it is conducted by a firm that has also quoted or tendered for the work or is a manufacturer of any proposed solution. Your survey must clearly show the name and qualification of the surveyor and the date.

To increase the likelihood of success, applicants should also provide further specialist evidence of the specific condition issue; the evidence should include, but it not limited to, the following areas:

- structural frame
- building fabric
- mechanical and electrical (M&E)
- asbestos utilities
- sewage & drainage
- fire safety & security
- health & safety issues
- site layout

Surveys should not be older than 1 October 2022 and need to be independent and impartial. Anything older than this, and/or not considered independent and impartial, will be discounted and not considered as part of your application. Where you are not including the full survey, you must include the front page(s) clearly showing the name and qualification of the surveyor and the date.

The condition survey will need to be undertake by an independent, suitably qualified person and should contain specific grading and prioritisation ratings; condition grade A to D (from 'good' through to 'bad' condition) and priority rating 1 to 4 (from 'immediate action required' through to 'work required in 5+ years'). We expect surveys to have been conducted within the last three years and demonstrate D1 to C2 condition issues. Any survey included in your application must clearly show the name and qualification of the surveyor and the date.

If you have surveys that are not graded as described above, you should ensure the condition grading and prioritisation rating are clearly explained so the assessor can interpret the information correctly.

Please note that generic letters of support from surveyors are not acceptable as evidence of condition and/or priority rating or of the urgency of need for the works and will not be considered.

Condition Data Collection (CDC)

A CDC report presents data collected following a visual, non-intrusive data collection exercise and can be used to prompt further investigation.

The CDC report is not an in-depth condition survey nor a structural survey and so the data presented is high-level and is therefore not sufficient to make a full assessment of a

CIF application. A CDC2 report can be used to support a CIF application, but on its own will not be sufficient to make a full assessment of a CIF application. We would expect to see a CDC2 report supported with additional evidence, e.g., a full, in-depth condition or structural survey.

Please note that CDC1 reports shared during the CDC1 programme that ran between 2017 and 2019 no longer meet the requirement of being dated within 3 years and should not be submitted with a CIF application. If CDC1 reports are included, they will be discounted and not considered as part of your application.

You should continue to include block references in the same format as set out in your CDC report, either from CDC1 or the current CDC2 programme.

Other evidence of condition

Evidence should also include (where applicable):

- Relevant photographs that are clear and sufficiently detailed. For example, if you are applying for a roofing project, provide photographs of multiple sections of the roof(s). Photographs should be labelled with commentary on the issue being illustrated. We have introduced an additional 1MB upload that you can use for photographs.
- Floor plans and elevations where appropriate to illustrate the location of the work.
- Letters about compliance from appropriately qualified professionals relevant to the specific issue e.g., from a fire safety inspection, police reports or electrical engineers. Please note that generic letters of support are not acceptable.
- Ofsted or other reports on the impact of facilities on teaching and learning.
- Project specific evidence, for example, detailed structural surveys, detailed Mechanical & Electrical testing report, moisture testing, thermal comfort measurements,
- Incident reports, including photographs.
- Maintenance expenditure, including invoices.
- Evidence of actual, or potential school closure. This should be from an independent third party (such as a Local Authority fire safety officer). Please note that including a 'closure warning' in the condition report alone is not sufficient evidence. We would expect formal notice/warning of closure/potential closure to come from relevant bodies such as the Health and Safety Executive or the Fire Service.
- You should consider also including more persuasive evidence such as external communications with parents/guardians and/or internal communications such as governing body meeting minutes, staff notifications etc. Please note that statements, such as headteacher statements or site manager statements are not acceptable evidence of actual, or potential, closure.

Good Estate Management for Schools

We expect applicants to manage their estate effectively and strategically, to maintain it in a safe working condition. [Good estate management for schools \(GEMS\)](#) provides guidance on how to do this, including information on:

- Strategic estate management – having an estate vision, strategy and asset management plan.
- Information you need to know about your estate.
- Planning and prioritising maintenance.
- Health and safety.

The GEMS self-assessment tool enables you to check if you have the things you need in place and provides an action plan with links to the relevant guidance. GEMS also contains a range of tools and checklists to help schools and responsible bodies manage their school buildings and land.

As part of your application, you will be required to confirm that you have reviewed this guidance and that your condition project is consistent with your estate strategy and asset management plan. Your score will be enhanced where you can provide relevant evidence from your self-assessment, asset management plan and estate strategy. Please see [Evidence of GEMS process and strategy](#) in the ‘assessment of project need for condition projects’ section of the guidance for more information on the scoring of this sub-criterion.

The new [School estate management standards - GOV.UK](#) and enhancements to the [Estate management: competency framework - GOV.UK](#) were developed to support all schools in a practical and non-judgemental way, to understand where to start, how to progress and to make the best use of expert advice, such as GEMS.

Block replacement / refurbishment

We will consider a block replacement in the context of the overall standards set out in [Building Bulletin 103 or 104](#) as appropriate. You will need to meet those standards and refer to the Generic Design Brief within the DfE Construction design standards. A project that over-specifies the space required compared to current area standards or performance will not score highly.

We would normally expect the replacement build to be no larger than the current block. However, we will allow small increases in the replacement block if that is required to meet [Building Bulletin 103 or 104](#) space standards and/or Health & Safety, Equality Act and DDA compliance, or child safeguarding considerations. If the proposed new build is larger than the existing block and larger than current area guidelines, then the application will be disqualified.

If a block is being replaced, please ensure you are also meeting the standards set out in [Building Bulletin 100](#).

Block replacement is a timely opportunity to consider the environmental impact of the building. Your score will be enhanced where you can evidence how the project aligns with sustainability design standards with the DfE Construction design standards.

Changes to the Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA)

You must clearly identify the changes in the GIFA as part of any application. This should include the GIFA being renewed or refurbished as well as the GIFA being removed or demolished and any new build.

Sustainability considerations

We expect applicants to consider energy efficient and environmentally sustainable options when replacing components in and around buildings in the move towards reducing carbon emissions and future proofing estates.

Please note that works to improve energy efficiency, such as lighting projects, which do not involve works to address high need condition issues, are unlikely to be successful in receiving CIF funding as they have a lower priority.

You should refer to the sustainability and design standards within the DfE Construction design standards when preparing your project. These design standards set out the quality standards and performance requirements for school buildings and grounds.

Boiler and heating systems

As set out in the [Heat and building strategy](#), there is regulation planned to phase out the installation of new fossil fuel heating systems for both off-gas-grid non-domestic buildings and on-gas-grid buildings.

Therefore, it is important to consider different types of boilers and heating systems when replacing old systems, depending on the building fabric and location.

Try to consider heating systems as a whole and be mindful of the impact of any changes that improvements to component parts make; this may help avoid situations such as new boilers not working because of leaking pipework or incompatible control systems.

We will consider sustainable replacement options in addition to like for like. However, you must consider the wider implications of the project like pipework and electrics etc. Ensuring that the building is sufficiently insulated will improve the efficiency of any replacement heating system.

You should model energy usage and likely savings to support any application for such projects.

For specific requirements for replacement heat generating systems please refer to DfE's Construction design standards.

If the operation costs are adversely impacted by the selection of low carbon heat sources, you could explore the use of hybrid systems to support an interim position, until the necessary upgrades are available, which may then support a full electric system. This should be clearly demonstrated within the net zero transition plan submitted as part of the application.

If you apply for a low carbon heating project, you must ensure that it can be supported and delivered. You should consider things like operational costs, existing building fabric, insulation and an electrical load assessment to determine whether substation upgrades may be required. This is not an exhaustive list, and you should complete a full feasibility study to determine whether your school is feasible for a low carbon heating solution. If you determine that you cannot deliver the project after it is approved, your project may either need to be value engineered or cancelled. No additional funding will be provided after project approval.

Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS)

Phase 4 of the PSDS was launched in September 2024 and is providing grant funding for three years over financial years 2025/26 to 2027/28. Grants have already been awarded to successful applicants in Phase 4 of the scheme.

Applicants that submitted a PSDS application for Phase 4 for low carbon heating but need CIF funding to meet the PSDS's like for like replacement criteria should have submitted a 'planning year' PSDS application in parallel to applying to CIF for the like for like replacement of their fossil fuel heating system. If approved via CIF, the funding from both schemes combined can effectively give opportunity for the trust to install a low carbon heating system, such as a heat pump, as part of the project.

If both the CIF and PSDS applications are successful, the CIF funding that forms the trust's contribution to the PSDS project can be used to begin the enabling works on the building fabric if necessary.

You must mention in your CIF application if you are planning to use CIF funding as your contribution for a PSDS project.

Following the 2025 Spending Review, the government has made the decision to commit no further investment for the PSDS beyond currently awarded projects. More information is available at [Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme | Salix Finance](#).

Safeguarding

Safeguarding projects often involve provision of additional security measures or remodelling of pedestrian/vehicle access points. If access improvements are required, you should work with your local authority highways department to tackle the identified issues in the most appropriate way and look to negotiate contributions for such works from other interested parties where possible.

If your condition project addresses safeguarding issues, you need to provide robust evidence to support urgency or need such as incident reports or police reports. We will not consider statements of unqualified opinion that there may be a risk of safeguarding issues as sufficient evidence, nor will we consider local area crime statistics. Evidence must be specific to your school.

We may accept projects that provide photographic evidence that their existing circumstances do not meet the minimum for security.

Access and specialist facilities for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Schools and local authorities should work together to decide which sources of funding may be appropriate for making adaptations. However, you may apply to CIF for works to improve the accessibility of school buildings for those with disabilities or special educational needs, including those with Educational Health and Care (EHC) plans (for example, through the provision of lifts, accessible toilets, showers and other hygiene facilities), where the urgent condition requirements of CIF can be demonstrated.

Emergency asbestos issues

The department takes the issue of asbestos in schools and colleges seriously and expects schools, local authorities, academy trusts and other responsible bodies to fulfil their duty to manage asbestos effectively and safely. The responsible body is the main employer of staff in a school, for example the local authority or academy trust.

Responsible bodies have a duty to [manage asbestos](#) in their schools and provide assurance that their schools are compliant with the asbestos management regulations ([Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012](#)). The department published updated [managing asbestos in your school or college](#) in October 2020 to assist with this responsibility.

Where there is any potential for asbestos to be present, it is a statutory requirement for schools to have an asbestos register and management plan.

The department follows expert advice from the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#), the regulator, which states, if asbestos containing materials are undamaged, and not in locations where they are vulnerable to damage, they should be left undisturbed, and their

condition monitored. We are clear, however, that when asbestos does pose a risk to safety and cannot be effectively managed in situ, it should be removed.

Where asbestos has been disturbed or damaged, unless the incident is minor and dealt with immediately, you should notify HSE of the incident. This is a legal requirement under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR).

Applicants with significant asbestos that is proving difficult to manage effectively (e.g. making access difficult to carry out repairs) may apply to CIF for support to remove it and should plan works around holiday periods.

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC)

CIF applications for RAAC mitigations and/or RAAC roof replacements will not be accepted. The department will fund both the immediate and long-term costs relating to the mitigation and removal of RAAC via a separate and additional form of funding.

Schools and colleges have been offered capital grants to fund refurbishment work to permanently remove RAAC, or rebuilding projects where these are needed, including through the School Rebuilding Programme.

If you have had RAAC confirmed within your buildings, you may wish to discuss your intention to apply for CIF with your appointed departmental caseworker in advance of submitting any CIF applications to address non-RAAC related condition issues in a building where RAAC is present. If you wish to still apply for CIF funding in the usual way to address these other non-RAAC condition issues, you should highlight in your CIF application if the project may be impacted by the presence of RAAC and the work that will be planned to permanently remove it.

You should refer to [identification guidance](#) for more information on identifying RAAC.

Evidence of project need for expansion projects

Project need for expansion projects is scored based on data held by the department, Get Information about Schools (GIAS) and the application form, where applicable and not on the evidence/information you provide. However, you must still upload a project need document, which should include:

- Subject to the size and scale of the project; an extract of CDC survey / Property Data Survey (PDS), an independent condition survey/consultant report or detailed survey and specialist reports.
- Schedule of accommodation. The schedule of accommodation tool is for mainstream primary and secondary schools only. Other school types will need to provide a list of accommodation.

- Photographs.
- Letters about compliance e.g., from fire officers or electrical engineers.

Basic Need

We do not intend CIF expansion funding to replace Basic Need funding. Academies wishing to expand to meet basic need demand will not receive any additional credit under the project need criteria.

We do not expect to receive applications for expansion that [basic need allocations](#) should fund. Any additional places funded through this programme will be reflected in future basic need allocations to avoid double funding.

Academies in areas of high basic need should consider working together with their local authority to maximise the impact of the available funding and demonstrating the benefits that can be accrued.

If your project is to expand admissions due to demographic growth in the population for years reception to 11 in mainstream settings, you should contact your local authority to seek basic need funding rather than CIF.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding expansion projects are those that address existing overcrowding in schools where the existing number of pupils on roll is greater than capacity.

You should outline whether you have had any interaction with your local authority to discuss basic need funding. We don't expect schools to admit pupils over and above their Pupil Admission Number (PAN) without having a long-term strategy in place to deliver the additional building capacity.

Significant change – Academies

Academy trusts may be required to submit a significant change application to their Regional Director (RD) where the proposal involves an expansion. The significant change process applies to both added place and overcrowding projects and you should refer to, and follow, the [making significant changes or closure by agreement](#) guidance.

The approval of any CIF funding for an expansion project that does not have the necessary significant change approval at the time of the CIF outcome announcement will be conditional. Conditional funding approval of a CIF expansion application does not guarantee that the significant change application will be successful. Likewise, significant change approval granted prior to the CIF outcome announcement does not guarantee that a CIF expansion application will be successful.

We do not consider any aspect of a significant change application as part of the CIF process.

If the significant change application is approved, you should make any required changes to your PAN and admissions policies in time for the completion of your capital project so that your full increase in capacity is promptly available to pupils in your area. You will also need to ensure your funding agreement is adjusted to reflect the increase in capacity.

Establishments that are not academy trusts are not required to follow the same significant change guidance, and the additional pupil threshold does not apply.

Eligible VA schools

Eligible VA schools must go through the relevant process to gain approval for the proposed increase in capacity/enlargement of premises. LAs are responsible for proposing and making decisions on proposals to expand LA maintained schools that meet the statutory threshold, subject to following the statutory process set out in the Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools' guidance.

Post-16 expansion

Other establishments that are not academy trusts who are applying for CIF funding to expand their post-16 provision will need to demonstrate that their project is not creating a surplus of post-16 capacity in the local area. These applications will be reviewed to ensure there is evidence of need for additional post-16 places in the local area, as well as the availability and need for the type of provision proposed.

Academies wishing to expand their sixth-forms, and sixth-form colleges looking to expand will be assessed in a similar way to ensure fairness between the two groups of institutions. In both cases, we expect there to be a revenue benefit from expanding the number of sixth-form places, so we would expect academies and sixth-form colleges to contribute towards the cost of the development. Such projects must be submitted as projects increasing the number of admissions (irrespective for whether it is the main year of entry).

Growth data

You should provide growth data for the current year only. There is no need to complete for all five years as set out in the application form. Please ensure that it is only input within the relevant existing fields in the CIF portal.

You need to provide the following information, to demonstrate its anticipated benefits:

- number(s) of places specified in your funding agreement (on occasion, funding agreements will include more than one number e.g., if separate numbers of places

are included for sixth-form or SEN unit places). For post-16 establishments this is the published number of places.

Both with and without the proposed project:

- gross internal floor area (GIFA) of the whole school (m²) and how this relates to the recommended area contained within [Building Bulletin 103 or 104](#) as appropriate. Make sure you explain significant differences in the application.
- number of pupils on roll (NOR), as applicable for the age range of the education establishment.

Demand data

We only require demand data from post-16 establishments. There is no need for other establishments to provide this as it is already collected by the department. The following data on demand over a four-year period is required for post-16 establishments:

- Applications in year 12.
- Year 12 admittances in main year of application.

Net capacity

You should complete the table on existing and forecast capacity and refer in your application to the change in the net capacity because of the proposed project by confirming the number of additional places that will be created by the project over and above the number(s) in your current funding agreement. You can provide a further explanation of changes in capacity in the text box 'general comments about demand'.

This also applies if the project is to address overcrowding and where you do not expect there to be an increase in the number on roll (NOR). The only circumstances where the net capacity is unlikely to change is if the project is to provide additional non-teaching support space such as dining facilities.

Please clearly set out within the supporting documentation the proposed changes in the GIFA as a result of the project. This should include a summary of the GIFA for the existing and proposed buildings, as well as new build, refurbished and demolished space.

If your project is solely expansion, you will be required to provide a [Schedule of accommodation](#). The schedule of accommodation tool is for mainstream primary and secondary schools only. Other school types will need to provide a list of accommodation.

Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) programme

In the [Net Capacity Assessment \(NCA\) programme](#) the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) carries out visits to schools to measure and record the size and use of available

space. This generates an NCA report which calculates the number of pupils a school can accommodate. Where available, we encourage applicants to use net capacity assessments to provide evidence of their capacity. Trusts interested in finding out more about the NCA programme and tool should contact:

dfc.ncaprogramme@education.gov.uk.

The Department also uses GIAS data to assess expansion projects. You should ensure that the GIAS pupil number on roll information and capacity information is up to date as we use the capacity data from GIAS when assessing a CIF application relating to overcrowding.

Supporting evidence for all project types

Project Cost

Your evidence should include (subject to the size and scale of the project):

- cost plan (breakdown of costs) appropriate to the size and scale of the project.
- copies of quotes/estimates/tenders/summary of any procurement exercise. Please remember that as the responsible body, you are fully responsible for any procurement exercise.
- cash flow forecast (where appropriate).
- details of procurement routes. Please remember that as the responsible body, you are fully responsible for any procurement exercise.
- market testing to demonstrate additional/abnormal costs, where appropriate.
- details or evidence of any savings being made, including any environmental savings the project will provide.
- letters of funding commitment from other sources (if applicable).

Well-considered options

- Consider all your options with an open mind, and don't present a preferred option as a fait accompli.
- Quantify the alternatives and show the costs and tangible differences in your options appraisal.
- Always present a "do nothing" option i.e., show us why and prove what the negative impact would be, particularly when trying to demonstrate urgent need.

Detailed costings

- Show your costing clearly and in as much detail as possible. A clear and detailed specification of work will help you get clear and detailed costings.

- The more certain your cost, the lower the financial risk to the project, i.e., multiple tenders or formal quotes are more certain than estimates. Quotes must be consistent, i.e., for the same scope of works.
- Be realistic, i.e., try to keep costs down, but be realistic about the funding the project needs, including contingencies. Underestimating costs puts you at a greater risk of going over budget and additional funding will not be provided after project approval.
- Make sure you can afford any financial contributions put forward. If you determine you cannot afford your contribution after the project is approved, additional funding will not be provided, and your project may either need to be value engineered or cancelled.
- Ensure that you meet the affordability tests if you are intending to apply for a CIF loan and that the repayments are affordable.

Sustainability

We expect applicants to consider energy efficient and environmentally sustainable options when replacing components in and around buildings in the move towards reducing carbon emissions and future proofing estates. All applications will need to demonstrate that these factors have been taken into consideration through a net zero transition plan/sustainable estate strategy, including:

- Examples of current or near future green installation works on the school estate (related or unrelated to the CIF project).
- Evidence to demonstrate sustainability, energy savings or carbon reductions.
- Where applicable, reference to any sustainable options considered in the options appraisal.

Further details on the information required and how we will score this sub-criterion is set out in the [Project cost – all project types](#).

Project Planning

Evidence should ideally include (subject to the size and scale of the project):

- quantification of other options/options appraisal.
- milestone chart/detailed programme plan or Gantt chart.
- quantification of benefits.
- a comprehensive risk assessment with mitigations.
- evidence of prioritisation.
- master planning for the site and a business plan.
- project context for the wider site.
- pre-planning advice or any planning evidence.
- or all of the above in a feasibility study.

We expect to see greater levels of detail for large, high value projects.

Rigorous planning

- Have a clear and detailed delivery plan, showing how, when, and by whom the project will be delivered. You should avoid including generic delivery plans.
- Minimise disruption through project phasing i.e., plan how the project will be delivered around school terms.
- Manage risk effectively, i.e., building projects have a wide range of risks associated with them, from health and safety, to scope changes, to delays, and many more. Plan in detail for all risks that could affect your project and make the risk register task based. You should avoid including generic risk registers and ensure they include specific risks for your project.

Feasibility study – all project types

A feasibility study looks at whether a project is viable and helps identify the best option for delivery. You should carry out a feasibility study where your project may be considered complex with multiple options, regardless of value.

For all CIF project types, the feasibility study should include an evaluation and analysis of the proposed project. This should be based on a detailed scope of works and in some cases an extensive investigation of the current site and property. It should confirm that all aspects of the project have been effectively considered and that the preferred option will provide the best chance of success and value for money.

The aim of the feasibility study is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed project objectively and rationally. You should provide information on opportunities, issues and threats that could be present and could either support your project or create problems. You also need to confirm the resources required to deliver the project on time and on budget.

What to include in a feasibility study

The feasibility study for the project on the proposed site should include, but not limited to:

- project description and evaluation.
- demonstration of need and scope of works proposed to address the need.
- full details of surveys undertaken or planned.
- what is the design solution and why will it work.
- details of energy efficiency or sustainability features.
- detailed professional and robust cost management plan or a contractor's cost estimate.
- an outline of planning requirements and evidence of planning permission (if appropriate).

- benefits/constraints of the project.
- site issues affecting the project, site entrances, disturbance on local residence.
- knowledge of location of utilities or the location and extent of asbestos and any cost savings as a result of the project.
- how is this project affordable and able to demonstrate value for money.
- risk analysis and mitigation in a comprehensive risk register for the entire project and specifically deliverability of the works in a teaching and learning environment.
- what will happen if an emergency occurs, fire, flood etc.
- who are the professional Project Management team and what is their track record.
- capacity and capability of the academy's Project Team.
- a detailed plan of the required resources and where they will come from.
- what will the procurement route be and why is this the best value for money
- site plans, floor plans and/or elevations where these will assist in establishing the location of the proposed works.

How to apply

CIF portal

All applications for CIF funding are made on the [CIF portal](#). We do not accept applications made through other routes.

Applicants should refer to the user guide on the portal for help.

The application form is designed for you to summarise the most important features and rationale behind a project. You should attach project documentation as evidence to support the case being made, please see [Documents to upload with your application](#).

CIF portal account access

If your trust or school is applying to CIF for the first time you will need to send a request for access via the [Customer Help Portal](#). You will have an account created and will be sent an invitation to register to the portal. However, please check with other colleagues in your trust/school to ensure that they haven't already created an account before contacting us.

When you create an account, please use your trust's Companies House number as the username. If you do not have a Companies House number, please use your URN with the first two digits being 00 e.g., 00123456. We do not recommend that you change your username once it has been set.

You should also provide:

- email address – it is recommended that you use a generic account, i.e. admin@school.com, office@school.com as this makes it easier to contact account holders and ensures schools are not locked out of CIF Portal accounts when individual staff move on. All correspondence regarding your CIF application will be sent to the portal account holder.
- your name
- position - e.g. Head Teacher, Business Manager, CFO
- telephone number
- trust number - Companies House number, if applicable
- School name(s) and URN(s)

You should make sure that all of the contact details are kept up to date as this will be our main way to communicate with you about your application.

If you have forgotten your username, please submit your details via the [Customer Help Portal](#) and we will provide you with the information. If you have forgotten your password, you can use the 'forgotten password' option on the portal sign-in page to reset it.

You should not share your CIF portal log-in details with any third-party organisation as this presents an increased risk of fraud. However, we recognise that for practical reasons you may choose to share these details for applications.

Nevertheless, if you share your account log-in details with others, the Accounting Officer remains accountable for all action taken and information submitted in the account, including the submission of any application.

We recommend that you change your password periodically, particularly if you have shared your log-in details with a third-party and you are no longer engaging their services or if you have taken over the account from an individual who no longer works for the organisation.

We will not accept requests for school/trust portal account information, including username requests, from technical advisers or consultants. We will only accept requests from the designated portal account holder from the school/trust.

If you are unable to register and/or create an account but think that you are eligible to apply for CIF, please contact us as soon as possible via the [Customer Help Portal](#).

It is recommended that you log in to the CIF portal and begin your application at least seven working days before the deadline. This will allow sufficient time for the team to assist you through the Customer Help Portal should you experience any technical difficulties. Please do not submit multiple requests for the same issue.

Please note that the application deadline will not be extended if a request submitted via the Customer Help Portal has not been responded to, even if the request was submitted before the deadline.

Please be aware that the CIF portal may run slower in the last 24 hours before the deadline due to a high volume of use.

How we assess your application

Applications are assessed solely on the information provided in the application for the CIF 2026-27 round. We do not take past bids into consideration. Each application is assessed by two different assessors from two different assessor companies with around a third undergoing moderation. For CIF 2026-27, we will prioritise projects in the highest priority project type, which demonstrate a high urgency of need, an impact on the school or closure of key facilities and strong evidence of significant need, which meet a minimum standard in the project cost and project planning criteria (and can be supported within available funding). We will then fund projects meeting the success threshold, which will be determined by ranking remaining projects highest to lowest and identifying the threshold based on available funding. On average, only a third of applications have been successful in previous years and not all high quality projects can be supported, so applications are robustly prioritised against the published criteria.

Assessment considerations

Your CIF application will ultimately either be fully funded or unsuccessful. In certain circumstances we may place your application on hold. We will not usually part fund proposed works within an application. In the event of this happening, your application would be placed on hold. We may also place applications on hold for a variety of other reasons (see [Projects placed on hold pending further due diligence](#) section) whilst further due diligence is undertaken. You will not be able to accept the terms and conditions or access the funding whilst the due diligence is ongoing. Any expenses incurred prior to full approval and/or acceptance of the terms and conditions will not be funded by the department.

We may attach conditions of funding that must be met before you can accept the terms and conditions and access funding. You will not be able to accept the terms and conditions or access the funding until the condition of funding is met. Any expenses incurred prior to full approval and/or acceptance of the terms and conditions will not be funded by the department.

Any applications that are disqualified will be categorised as 'unsuccessful' and your application score may be reverted to show '0'. Disqualification will be considered where we identify a significant breach with any relevant criteria in this guidance, as well as any regulatory and/or statutory guidance published elsewhere.

Assessment criteria

Assessors will evaluate each project using information contained within the application, and make a relative judgement, to award an overall project score. Expansion projects are assessed using school performance and data generated by the DfE, and not just information provided by applicants.

Applications can receive a total of 100 points, with 60 points available under project need, 15 points under project planning and 25 points under project cost.

Our intention is to fund applicants with the highest priority and most pressing need, but only where the proposed project is appropriately planned and presents best value for money.

The following sections set out the basis for judgements under each set of assessment criteria and sets out the information you might consider providing to support applications. The information is a guide and is not exhaustive.

Assessment of project need for condition projects

Project need accounts for 60 points from a total of 100 for condition projects and consists of five sub-criteria: project type, urgency of need, strength of evidence, nature and extent of impact and GEMS.

Project type – project priority and specification

We expect only applications that closely align with the CIF policy priorities will be successful. We are unlikely to fund projects that fall into the lowest categories. Assessors will make a final judgement under which category each project falls. The CIF project priorities are set out below.

All applicants should refer to DfE's construction design standards. Where new buildings are being provided, full compliance with DfE's construction design standards is required. Applicants should provide sufficient evidence to support this, including outline specifications. Where refurbishment works are proposed in existing buildings, any elements of non-compliance with the performance requirements of the DfE's construction design standards should be clearly identified in the application, including supporting evidence and outline specifications.

Highest priority

Projects addressing legislative compliance, health and safety, impacted learning and critical replacement of coal fired heating systems with low carbon alternatives – where there is a risk of school closure, including:

- Building safety matters.
- Emergency and managed asbestos removal to facilitate essential works.
- Gas safety.
- Heating systems - where coal fired systems are proposed to be replaced with low carbon options and the risk of school closure is demonstrated.
- Electrical safety.
- Water services (hot and cold) and drainage.
- Ventilation improvements to resolve air quality or overheating issues - where there has been a demonstratable significant impact on learning.
- Other interventions to improve overheating issues, such as external shading devices, or where shown to be necessary, air conditioning – where there has been a demonstratable significant impact on learning.
- Fire safety.
- Security and safeguarding. Security fencing projects are unlikely to be successful unless a significant health & safety or safeguarding issue can be demonstrated and backed up by third party evidence, such as police reports. Please note that local area crime statistics are not acceptable evidence.

High priority

Life expired condition replacement – where there is a risk of complete or partial school closure (complete closure will score higher marks), including:

- Building structure – e.g. structural and weather tightness.
- Heating systems - where oil or gas heating systems are proposed to be replaced with low carbon options, these will score higher marks within the range. The need for life expired condition replacement with the risk of school closure must be demonstrated.
- Electrical systems.
- Utility capacity and connections.

Medium priority

Life expired condition replacement, including:

- Building fabric – internal or external.
- Structural defects.
- Heating systems. Where oil or gas heating systems are proposed to be replaced with low carbon options, these will score higher marks within the range, but the need for life expired condition replacement must still be demonstrated.
- Electrical systems.

Low priority

Special functional areas of the school below current standards, including:

- Whole block.
- Basic teaching.
- Large spaces, studios, dining and social.
- Kitchen. Kitchen refurbishments are not likely to be successful unless a health & safety issue can be demonstrated and backed up by third party evidence such as a legionella risk assessment.
- Plant.
- Learning resources areas.
- Staff and admin.
- Storage.
- Changing.
- Toilets. Toilet refurbishments are not likely to be successful unless a health & safety issue can be demonstrated and backed up by third party evidence, such as a legionella risk assessment.
- Circulation.

Lowest priority

Other works: evidence must provide a clear condition and value for money case. This might include:

- Accessibility improvements (teaching and non-teaching).
- Building fabric (non-teaching, e.g., external sports equipment stores etc.). Sports hall and swimming pool projects need to demonstrate the teaching and learning implications and the impact the condition issue is having on the school. The proposal also needs to demonstrate how much availability is utilised by the school and how much through leasing or other arrangements.
- Mechanical and electrical systems (non-teaching).

Will not be funded by CIF 2026-27

Other works: all other works, where there is either weak or no evidence of significant compliance, health & safety concerns or condition/value for money.

We will not consider these cases a priority for CIF 2026-27 and will reject them on that basis. Examples include resurfacing car parks or small teaching environment refurbishments.

Urgency of need

The more urgent the need that is evidenced, the more marks will be given in this sub-criterion. You will score low marks if:

- The level of urgency is low.
- The urgency of need is not apparent.
- You include low priority issues alongside urgent works with no justification.

You will score high marks if:

- The level of urgency is immediate (i.e., issue must be dealt with over the summer holidays, otherwise likely closure in September 2026 or addressing an area which is already out of use, impacting significantly on the operation of the school).
- You only include works of the highest need.
- Any non-essential items included are fully justified as part of the project.

If the proposed works are not required to be carried out within the next two years, it is unlikely that the application will be successful.

Strength of evidence for extent of need

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, there needs to be strong evidence of significant need providing justification for all works. Zero and low carbon heating

replacement projects must justify the need to replace the existing fossil fuel boiler. Sustainability and energy efficiency must not be the sole justification for replacement.

You will score low marks if there is insufficient or no evidence of significant need.

You need to show clearly, through the supporting evidence, the poor condition of the building(s) or element of the building(s) which the proposed works will address.

Nature and extent of impact

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, there needs to be an impact overall on the school or closure of key facilities. You will score low marks where there is solely localised impact.

Evidence of GEMS process and strategy

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, you need to demonstrate/evidence the GEMS approach to the trust's or school's estate management:

- GEMS self-assessment.
- A developed estate strategy/asset management plan.
- How the project fits into the wider estate strategy.
- If applicable to the project, how it will improve energy efficiency or sustainability.

Assessment of project need for expansion projects

Project need accounts for 60 points from a total of 100 for expansion projects and consists of four sub-criteria for academies and post-16 establishments: popularity/demand, performance, capacity constraints and deprivation, and three sub-criteria for special schools: performance, capacity constraints and deprivation. The project need score is based on data held by the department, Get Information about Schools (GIAS) and the application form, where applicable and not on the evidence/information you provide. However, you must still upload a project need document.

We will take into account the proportion of the school's pupils who are from a disadvantaged background when we assess the need for expansion that create additional places. This is to support the creation of new places in high performing schools with a high relative proportion of disadvantaged pupils. For added places projects, we also consider cost per place.

Popularity / demand

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, there needs to be a very high demand.

For academies, demand is based on % 1st and 2nd preferences of Published Admission Number (PAN).

For post-16 establishments, demand is based on the applications in year 12 and year 12 admittances in the main year of application for the previous year, current year and future year data provided in your application form. If you do not provide this information in your application form, you will be scored 0 for this sub-criterion.

You will score 0 if there is low demand (preferences less than 110% of PAN).

Special schools are not scored on this sub-criterion and scores for the remaining three sub-criteria are weighted to account for this.

Performance

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, the school or college needs to be Ofsted outstanding in quality of education and leadership & management subcategories, or where a rating in one or both subcategories is not available, Ofsted outstanding the single word judgment, and have attainment or progress at, or above, the national average. For schools that have been inspected under Ofsted's renewed education framework, which came into effect on 10 November, we will review bids on a case-by-case basis.

Special schools will be assessed on Ofsted outcomes only.

For post-16 establishments, Ofsted outcomes plus the relevant performance data.

Capacity constraints

To score maximum marks under this sub-criterion, there needs to be a severe shortage of capacity.

For overcrowding projects:

- For academies and special schools, this will be based on Get Information about Schools (GIAS) data, including the published capacity figure and current number on roll (NOR) as of the date the application round closes.
- For post-16 establishments, this will be based on Individualised Learning Record (ILR) Full Time Education (FTE) data and the capacity figure from your application form. If you do not include a capacity figure on your application form, you will score 0.

You will score 0 if you are less than 10% over your capacity figure, and your application will be disqualified.

For added places projects:

- For academies and special schools: current capacity figure published on GIAS as of the date the application round closes, plus number of added places when the project is complete.
- For post-16: ILR FTE plus growth figure.

You will score 0 if your capacity will increase by less than 10%, and your application will be disqualified.

Deprivation

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, you will have a high relative proportion of pupils from disadvantaged background as defined by IDACI measure.

You will score low marks where you have a low relative proportion of pupils from a disadvantaged background.

Project cost – all project types

Project cost accounts for 25 points from a total of 100 for all projects and consists of four sub-criteria: overall costs, cost certainty, funding sources and environmental sustainability.

We expect all projects to show they are costed appropriately and that all project costs are within an appropriate cost range for the type of works proposed. For new build projects, we will check that the cost per square metre is within an acceptable range, taking into account abnormal factors.

There is a score for how your project demonstrates an environmentally sustainable approach, or where this is not possible, examples of other green technology installations unrelated to the project. When approaching refurbishment projects, it is important that applicants consider using products and technologies to future proof school estates, having regard for climate change resilience and environmental sustainability.

Your application will be disqualified if you score very low marks in the overall costs sub-criteria (see below), regardless of how you score against other criteria.

Costs of works will vary significantly from site to site due to local economic variances, site features (e.g., presence of asbestos), planning constraints and project specification/scope. Assessors will refer to industry standards and experience to consider whether the levels of costs are appropriate.

Any cost overruns will be at the expense of the applicant, although an appropriate level of contingency funding is permitted. Where local conditions may lead to costs outside of industry benchmarks, you must clearly explain in your application why and provide supporting evidence. You must be able to demonstrate that the use of provisional sums and contingency are fundamental to the delivery of the project.

Cost plans should take account of the proposed risk of price increases and local economic conditions. Cost plans should also be realistic about the level of professional fees, allowances and contingency. The amount of contingency should be clearly identified in the application, and you should provide an explanation for the level of contingency included. This should demonstrate that it is appropriate to the scale and type of the project, and the level of work already undertaken to establish price certainty and reduce residual risks.

You may include contingencies and provisional sums within your application. However, it is important that you recognise that project contingency is for unforeseen work, whilst provisional sums should only be expended on work of the scope and nature set out in the description of the included sum. Project contingency and provisional sums must not fund increased scope without an approved Scope Change Request. We have included a new

section in the Post Approval Guidance to set out how the expenditure of contingency and provisional sums will be monitored and administered during the delivery phase of approved projects.

When entering figures onto the application form, please round up to the nearest GBP (£). Do not enter pence.

Overall costs

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, there should be a clear scope with overall cost below expectations/industry benchmarks.

All cost elements should appear reasonable and where there are 'abnormal' or high costs, they are clearly justified.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) defines abnormal costs as those which might be considered as project specific (i.e., they are not a 'typical' construction cost) and are classified as such because they tend to have a notable consequence. Examples include asbestos removal, demolition costs, temporary accommodation and specialist substructures works. Abnormal costs must be clearly identified and justified. This will assist in the benchmarking of the overall costs.

If your project will contribute towards longer term sustainability goals, such as achieving net zero carbon estate emissions, we will take this into account when assessing the costs of your project. If you wish to set out how you have incurred additional costs in order to achieve or make significant steps towards net zero, please evidence this in the cost document upload.

You will score low marks where the level of costs are above expectations with no clear justification e.g., excessive professional fees, unjustified additional allowances and contingency.

The department will look at the cost per place for added place expansion projects and will expect these to meet industry benchmarks unless you provide clear justification.

Project costs should only include capital costs and not any recurrent costs, such as maintenance plans, insurance, staff costs etc.

Cost certainty

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, multiple tenders/quotes should be thorough and well evidenced, with fixed prices and in line with expectations relative to the size of the project and a firm commitment evidenced from contractors to stick to the tender price if appointed.

You will score low marks where there is no evidence of tenders/quotes attached to the application, or they are inadequate for the size of the project.

Funding sources

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, there will be a significant (and affordable) contribution from other sources or via a CIF loan.

Please note that VA schools will only score in this sub-criterion if they provide more than 10% of the project value. For example, if a VA school contributes a total of 15%, they would receive the appropriate score for providing a 5% contribution.

The funding sources score is calculated by first adding the value of any CIF loan requested to the value of any contribution. The combined value as a percentage against the total project cost will generate a score as follows:

- 0 points for a 0% to 4.99% contribution
- 1 point for a 5% to 9.99% contribution
- 2 points for a 10% to 14.99% contribution
- 3 points for a 15% to 19.99% contribution
- 4 points for a 20% to 24.99% contribution
- 5 points for a 25% to 29.99% contribution
- 6 points for a 30% (or over) contribution

This score contributes to the overall score for the bid. It is the overall score that is the deciding factor as to whether a bid is successful and not the level of contribution provided.

Environmental sustainability

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, there will be evidence that applicants are committed to reducing carbon emissions across the school estate and the project delivers one or more of the following as a result of replacing components:

- An increase in energy efficiency and reduction in energy use and carbon emissions.
- Supports environmental sustainability and climate change resilience.

Applicants can evidence this through one or more of the following:

- Data supplied to evidence increase in energy efficiency or reduction in energy use, or environmental sustainability is clear and strongly supports the project.
- Explain how the project proposal demonstrates alignment with DfE's construction design standards.

Where this is not possible, or applicable to the project type to demonstrate an environmentally sustainable/energy efficient approach, other examples of interventions to reduce carbon emissions unrelated to the CIF application can be provided. These can be existing facilities or works due to be done in the near future. This should be accompanied with data where possible, highlighting reduced carbon emissions across the school estate.

The statement does not have to be exhaustive, and we expect it to be no more than 1-2 pages in length. When setting out the approach or plan to reduce carbon emissions across the school estate, responses that describe physical changes to buildings/ components and landscape around buildings that will result in carbon emission reductions or support environmental sustainability and climate change resilience will be required to achieve full marks. These options can be recently installed or due to be installed in the near future.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- solar panel installation.
- rainwater recycling facilities.
- smart lighting / heating systems.
- heat pump installation.

If your project cannot evidence a positive environmental impact, you must provide a narrative as to why this is not achievable. Where an option identified in the options appraisal for a green project was not used, a clear justification as to why this was not possible must be provided.

Project planning – all project types

Project planning accounts for 15 points from a total of 100 for all projects and consists of three sub-criteria: appropriateness of solution, timescales and delivery plan.

Assessors must be able to see that the proposed solution appropriately addresses the nature, extent and urgency of the need evidenced, and that applicants have the ability to deliver the solution. You must be able to show that projects are planned appropriately and realistically, taking account of potential risks.

It is your responsibility to consult your local planning authority to check if planning permission is required before applying to CIF. The application should indicate clearly whether or not planning permission is required and whether it has been confirmed with the local planning authority.

If you are an academy with a CIF project that impacts on school land, it is likely to require a separate consent of the Secretary of State via a land transaction application. For example, the acquisition or sale of a freehold or leasehold interest in land or buildings; change is use of playing field land when expanding the school building footprint; or if you are relocating utilities that involves the grant of easements over school land and/or the grant of a new lease or variation of an existing lease will all require a separate application for Secretary of State consent.

Approval of a CIF application does not provide or imply Secretary of State approval for any land transaction required to deliver the approved project. The [land transaction guidance](#) will assist you in determining whether a separate approval is required. Please access the [application form\(s\) and associated property information notes](#) to enable your land transaction application to be made. The CIF approved project cannot proceed until the separate consent of the Secretary of State is obtained to any land transaction.

If the application relates to a proposed expansion that would increase the school's capacity, you will need to seek separate departmental approval by following the [significant change](#) process. This ensures that sufficient consultation of interested parties has taken place. Please note that the approval of any CIF funding for an expansion project that does not have the necessary significant change approval at the time of the CIF outcome announcement will be conditional.

Appropriateness of solution

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, the highest need should be prioritised and a costed options appraisal with quantified benefits that supports the solution provided.

Where the project is a small project, there should be an appropriately scaled options appraisal to support the solution.

For all projects, where applicable, the options appraisal should include a sustainable and/or net zero-carbon solution.

You will score low marks where low priority issues are included and if there is no options appraisal.

Timescales

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, readiness milestones (e.g., planning approval) need to be complete by May 2026, and the project delivery timescale must be appropriate to the scale of the project.

We expect smaller projects to be delivered within the 2026-27 financial year and larger projects, by the end of the 2027-28 financial year.

Projects should not begin before June 2026.

You will score low marks if there are concerns with deliverability to the timescale, given the scale and nature of the project, or where it is clear that readiness milestones would not be complete until after January 2027.

We expect low carbon/sustainable heating projects will take longer to deliver and applicants will not be penalised for including an appropriate timescale for these types of projects.

Delivery plan

To score maximum marks in this sub-criterion, a realistic delivery plan for the project size supported by appropriate evidence should be submitted and there needs to be good consideration and mitigation of risk.

For urgent works, we expect contingent plans to be considered to perform the works during term time if there is a delay to the start date.

You will score low marks where there are concerns over the ability to deliver the project and/or it lacks a sufficiently detailed delivery plan or risk register for the size of project.

Annex A – Condition Improvement Funding Declaration

Condition Improvement Funding Declaration.

This declaration must be signed and uploaded by the Accounting Officer, or in the case of a sixth-form college or VA school, a suitably responsible member of the senior management team who will be held solely responsible for the application.

As the responsible person for this bid, you are responsible for the accuracy and relevance of the information in your application, as well as the submission of the application on the portal, and not any consultant or technical adviser. Should your application be successful, you will also be responsible for the management of the project as well as meeting the requirements of the post approval guidance and complying with the terms and conditions. Activity that breaches the terms and conditions, such as using funding for any work other than what has been specifically approved, may result in the responsible body having to repay some, or all, of the funding.

I can confirm that the below is correct:

- The application has been completed in accordance with the information for applicants' guidance and the checklist contained therein.
- The information contained in the application form is accurate and pertains only to the institution named in the bid.
- The project only pertains to buildings owned or leased by the responsible body or held by charitable site trustees for the school's purposes.
- There is no duplicate funding from any other sources for the proposed works set out within the application.
- Evidence of project need, project costs and project planning have all been uploaded, I have checked that no information is missing and that it pertains to the correct institution and project.
- That I am aware that any error or misleading information in the application or supporting documentation could disqualify the application or reduce the final score.

Name (Printed):

Title of position:

Name of Organisation:

Date:

Signature:



Annex B – CIF loans

Applications for CIF loans are made within the CIF application form on the CIF portal.

Academies, sixth-form colleges and VA schools who choose to apply for a loan will be eligible for additional points under the project cost criterion rather than if they had applied for their project to be funded through grant alone. However, the overriding element of any application is project need.

Assessment under this section will be based on the ratio of loan to grant. For example, a project funded 30% by a loan will see a greater increase in score than a project funded 5% by a loan.

In keeping with our principles of equality for academies with the maintained sector, we provide CIF loans at Public Works Loan Board rates of interest. These rates are the same that local authorities can access to invest in their schools. The interest rates that will be used for the programme are set out below and a [loan calculator](#) is available.

The minimum loan duration is 2 years, and the maximum is 10 years.

Duration of loan (years)	Interest rate (%)
2	4.78
3	4.84
4	4.88
5	4.92
6	4.96
7	5.01
8	5.06
9	5.12
10	5.19

Affordability tests

Before deciding on whether to apply for a loan, you must consider the affordability of repayments. We will apply a number of tests to assess the affordability of proposals, and your funding sources score will be adjusted accordingly where the affordability tests are not met.

Applicants failing to pass these tests will not be eligible to receive a loan but may still be considered for grant funding if scored highly enough in the other assessment criteria.

We do not expect you to submit additional documents, such as financial statements, to support affordability testing. We will obtain the data from the relevant sources.

Please do not apply for a loan if you do not meet the loan tests.

Affordability tests for academies

1. The total of the annual loan repayment for the academy, all existing loans (including any previous Salix loans) plus future loans (including the loan being applied for), must be less than 3% of the revenue grant ('GAG') that the academy was allocated in 2025-26.
2. The academy trust must not be under a Financial Notice to Improve (FNtl) or Notice to Improve (Ntl) where the DfE/ESFA have serious financial management or governance concerns.
3. The academy trust's external auditor must not have modified their report on regularity of the financial statements.
4. The trust's last audited financial statements must show that the trust was in cumulative revenue surplus.
5. The trust's latest budget forecast return must show a forecast revenue surplus, at August 2025, equivalent to 3% or more of the GAG allocation.
6. The trust's last audited financial statements must show that the trust has a current ratio of at least 1:1 (the 'current ratio' is the ratio of an organisation's current assets to its current liabilities).

Affordability tests for sixth-form colleges

1. The annual repayment must be less than 4% of the revenue grant that the sixth-form college received from the DfE in academic year 2025-26.
2. The sixth-form college has a financial health assessment of satisfactory, good or outstanding.

Affordability tests for Voluntary Aided (VA) schools

1. The total of the annual loan repayment for the requested loan, plus the annual loan repayment for any existing CIF loans approved in previous funding rounds, must be less than 4% of the revenue funding the school was allocated in 2025-26.
2. The school must confirm it is under no financial notice from the relevant local authority.
3. The school's own budget forecast must show a forecast cumulative revenue surplus to the end of the forecast period.

Repayments

Repayments are made through a reduction in the general annual grants (GAG) payments made by the DfE. Repayments taken from GAG payments.

You can repay your loan early without early repayment charges, providing you give a minimum of 30 days notice. You can use the [loan calculator](#) to show the impact of early repayment.

Annex C – Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA)

The DfE's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) is a voluntary arrangement for schools. It is an alternative to insurance through which the cost of risks that materialise will be covered by Government funds.

When undertaking extensions to or refurbishment of an existing building or structure that is owned by or the responsibility of the member, the member must consider how damage to the existing building (and its contents) and the new works are to be covered.

RPA provides cover for damage to any existing building or structure (and its contents) that are owned by an RPA member or for which the member is responsible and is undergoing refurbishment or extension works. Cover for the existing structure or building is up to the full reinstatement or replacement value of the existing structure or building and its contents.

The RPA does not need to be notified when works are being undertaken, and the school's existing buildings and structures and contents will continue to be covered for the duration of the refurbishment or extension works subject to the terms, conditions and limitations of the RPA membership Rules which members must adhere to.

The RPA also provides cover for damage to new (contract) works; cover is limited to £250,000 for any one claim.

Where the cover provided by the RPA is not sufficient

RPA members cannot agree under any form of contract with the contractor to insure the existing structure or contents in 'joint names' with the contractor, nor can it agree to obtain a waiver of subrogation for the contractor from its insurer. RPA is not insurance and is unable to provide 'joint names' cover or waive subrogation rights against any party including the contractor.

Please see below options to RPA members in relation to cover for contract works. If the RPA member opts for cover for contract works under the RPA, as above RPA members cannot agree under any form of contract with the contractor to insure the contract works in 'joint names' with the contractor, nor can it agree to obtain a waiver of subrogation for the contractor from its insurer.

To ensure conditions of the RPA membership rules are met, the RPA member needs to work alongside a legal expert to amend certain clauses within the works contract. Works contracts, in their standard form, tend to favour the contractor but are amendable by a professional with a license to the contract portal.

The considerations set out above need to be addressed prior to a school putting a project out to tender. Failure to do so will result in losses not covered by the RPA, the school

being in breach of contract and if insurance options are available later on in the project these will be subject to potentially high premiums which will be additional costs to the member.

Existing structures

RPA member to continue to cover the existing structures and contents under the RPA, any contract between the member and the contractor to be on the basis that the contractor retains responsibility for any damage that the contractor causes to the existing structure or contents. The contractor can cover this risk by way of a third-party public liability insurance policy. The member will need to consider an appropriate public liability limit of indemnity that the contractor is required to take out and maintain for the duration of the works. When considering an appropriate limit of indemnity, the member must take into account the potential for contractor actions to cause:

- damage to third party property (including the existing structure and its contents).
- death or injury to third parties (including member staff, pupils and visitors).
- financial or pecuniary loss.

The RPA member is required to work with a legal professional to amend clauses within any contract to reflect the comments above, the contract will need to set out that the:

- contractor to retain responsibility for any damage it causes to the existing structure or contents.
- contractor to take out and maintain public liability insurance for the duration of the works with an appropriate limit of indemnity.

Contract works

The options available to the RPA member in relation to cover for the contract works are as follows:

- RPA member may rely on the cover provided by the RPA (limited to £250,000 any one claim) and the contractor to retain any responsibility for any damage that it causes to the works. The contractor can cover this risk by way of a third-party public liability insurance policy, any contract terms entered into between the member and the contractor will need to reflect this; or
- a) RPA member may take out its own insurance for loss of or damage to the works in joint names with the contractor to cover the full reinstatement value of the works for the duration of the works (this insurance would be independent to the RPA cover and would be necessary, for example, if the works are valued in excess of £250k or there exists a contractual obligation for contract works insurance cover); or the

- b) RPA member may require that the contractor take out insurance for the works in joint names with the RPA member to cover the full reinstatement value of the works for the duration of the works.

If opting for an insurance solution for the cover for contract works, RPA members should think about and build insurance costs into their overall project costings to ensure the overall costs remain transparent and are fully budgeted for.

Further information on how the RPA member can arrange insurance cover can be accessed via the RPA welcome pack. To discuss the cover provided by RPA, you can contact the RPA cover advice line on 0117 9769 361 or email RPACover@wtwco-gsp.com.

It should be noted that the issues highlighted above are by no means a comprehensive list of insurance matters to consider during a CIF project. Your insurance advisors should be consulted on a general basis at an early stage to ensure you have appropriate insurance for your CIF project.

Annex D – School Resource Management Advisers (SRMA)

Any successful CIF applicants who have not previously had an SRMA visit in the last two academic years, or those trusts that are either already in a deficit position or that are predicting to be in a future deficit position, will be required to agree to an SRMA visit as a condition of funding.



Department
for Education

© Crown copyright 2025

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.

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

About this publication:

enquiries <https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe>

download www.gov.uk/government/publications

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

Connect with us on Facebook: facebook.com/educationgovuk